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The story of a Convict's Dash for Liberty complete in this No.

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"OH, IF HE WERE ONLY HERE—IF I COULD SEE HIM BUT FOR A MOMENT IT WOULD HASE THIS DULL CONSTANT PAIN,"  
CRIED STELLA BROOKFIELD MENTALLY.

## A DARING ESCAPE.

By a well-known Author.

[A NOVELETTE.]

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.

### CHAPTER I.

**I** AM so tired of it, so tired of it! This death-in-life grows unbearable!"

Leaning over the garden gate, looking away across the moors to the purple hills beyond, I, Stella Brookfield, utter these words in a kind of weary disgust—a state of utter hopelessness that the smallest pebble

in the shape of an event will ever stir the stagnant pool of my every day existence.

If I could only escape from it! But how? Stay where you are! the placid, surrounding influences seem to say. Food, clothing, shelter, freedom from all care or anxiety, a tranquil dream-like atmosphere, are yours while you remain here. What more would you have?

To-day, however, I am unusually restless and discontented; perhaps because I am quite alone.

My uncle, James Brookfield, has gone to visit a friend, who lives some five miles off.

Beyond the Vicar and the schoolmaster—both elderly and unmarried—we have no friends or acquaintances. A reserved, unsociable man, Uncle James has always

shunned intercourse with the other people living near us.

I have only a dog and my birds, by way of society. A girl friend of my own age is a luxury I have never enjoyed.

Our cottage, surrounded by a large, rambling flower and vegetable garden, stands quite by itself at some distance from the village.

Princetown, and the famous Dartmoor prison, are at least five miles away, in the very heart and citadel of Dartmoor, where the hills stand round the horizon like natural fortifications.

I have frequently seen the prison—a great, grey building, pierced with a multitude of small windows; or rather a collection of buildings, enclosed within a gigantic

The Serial Story GUY FORRESTER'S SECRET begins Next Week.

wall. I always turn away from it—surrounded as it is on all sides by wild and desolate moorlands—with a shudder.

The groups of convicts breaking stones by the roadside, each dressed in grey cap, jacket, and knickerbockers, spotted with marks like arrow-heads, never fail to depress me horribly.

Crime and misery seem branded on those hard, sullen faces. I pity their owners, even while I shrink from them in secret dread. I avoid going in that direction save when fate and Uncle James compel me to take it.

Even as I stand by the gate, a fog—one of the fogs so frequently upon Dartmoor—is slowly rising, blotting out the distant hills and the wide moorland. Even the scattered groups of whitewashed cottages, each with its pea-stack, and great bushes of crimson fuchsia before the door, are growing dim and misty. The still, heavy atmosphere is all in favour of a dense fog. With a little shudder I turn and go indoors, followed by my pet collie, Scamp.

Our sitting-room is very plainly furnished. As I stand in the centre of it I can see my reflection in the mantle-glass—a most unflattering mirror, with a crack running across it, which completely cuts my visage in two.

The reflection is that of a tall, slim girl, with eyes of deepest blue, and long curling lashes—Irish eyes—capable of almost any expression under the sun; a pale, clear, creamy complexion, and wavy masses of blue-black hair falling over her shoulders, merely fastened back with a ribbon. I have not had time to coil it yet this morning. My dress is of brown-holland, plainly made, its sole adornment a few late flowers stuck in my waist-belt.

Uncle James allows me about two guineas a year with which to replenish my wardrobe; and, thus far, I have been quite unable to favour M. Worth with an order.

"If I had only got a piano, like other girls!" I exclaim, discontentedly, as I get out my work-basket, and begin to attack the large holes in Uncle James's socks. "I think I could teach myself to play; and I *know* I can sing."

My voice is the one talent of which I have any reason to feel proud. It is a soprano—rich, full, flexible. The Vicar has pressed me into the choir service, and I am always expected to take the solos.

To a certain extent, he—a lover of music—has trained my voice. I can sing accurately, with due regard to established rules. It is my one accomplishment. My uncle, who educated me himself, never allowed me to acquire any others.

The fog is growing thicker, the sense of loneliness increases. I shall be glad when Uncle James returns, although, when he is at home, I often grow tired of his fidgety irascible presence.

Putting aside my work, I rise to prepare some dinner, talking all the while to Scamp, who understands me perfectly.

"You shall have something better than those horrid dry dog biscuits to-day, old boy," I remark, as I cut him some slices of cold meat off the joint, while he executes a war-dance expressive of delight round the table. "If Uncle James only knew it, though—"

Boom! Boom! Boom!

As the sullen sound of the gun comes rolling towards me across the moors the knife drops from my hand, I utter an involuntary cry.

I know its meaning only too well. I have heard it before. A convict has taken advantage of the fog, to effect his escape. The alarm has been raised, and warders are out in every direction, searching for the unhappy wretch, whose recapture is merely a

question of time, the chances being clean against his getting away.

Going to the door, I open it and look out. The fog is very dense; the moors and the stunted trees present a dim, spectral appearance. The road winding by our cottage garden is quite deserted. No human being is in sight.

"Heaven help him!" I say, mentally, as I go back to the table, leaving the door partly open. My sympathies, owing to some twist in my moral nature, are invariably on the side of the culprit, a fact of which Uncle James has frequently informed me. In imagination, I follow the escaped convict, and pity his frenzied condition, his wild alternations of hope and fear, his desperate dash for freedom.

Boom! boom! boom!

Again the sullen roar of the gun reaches my ears.

Ah! What was that?

I spring to my feet in sudden alarm at a crashing sound among the bushes at the back of the cottage, as if some heavy body had suddenly descended upon them. Scamp barks loudly, and rushes towards the open door. Another second, and it is darkened by a tall form.

Oh, Heaven, help me! Panting from his long, desperate run, muddy, blood-stained, bare-headed, the escaped convict stands before me, and I am alone in the house!

"Call off your dog," he cries, hoarsely, as Scamp springs at him. "I shall do you no harm. Call him off, I say, if you would not have him strangled."

He is keeping Scamp at bay as he speaks. I summon my voice and call the dog back to me; then stand there motionless, one hand on Scamp's collar, regarding my strange visitor in an ecstasy of terror.

"They are after me," he pants, his voice reduced to a whisper. "They will be here directly. I have doubled and turned like a hunted hare, but I could not throw them off the scent. If you have a woman's heart within your breast hide me, save me! Do not let me fall into their hands again!"

I gaze at him as if fascinated, making no reply. Terror has deprived me of speech. The escaped convict is a young man, tall, well-knit, and broad shouldered. Even his disordered appearance, and the hideous prison garb he wears, fail to render him wholly frightful or repulsive. The well-shaped, erect head, the regular, clean-cut features, handsome grey eyes, and firm chin, scarcely denote a criminal origin. His voice, too, is singularly refined, his manner devoid of all brutality. These facts impress themselves upon me unconsciously, as it were, as we regard each other steadfastly.

A loud shout reaches us from across the moors at this moment. The convict starts violently, then, with one hurried glance over his shoulders, enters the room and flings himself at my feet.

"They are coming!" he gasps, "and I am dead beat; I cannot run another mile. Tell me, is there any place here where I can hide? I swear that I will not harm you or yours if you befriend me. I am neither a thief nor a murderer. I was wrongly accused of manufacturing false bank-notes, pronounced guilty, and sentenced to penal servitude for a crime I had not committed. The shameful wrong I had suffered was driving me mad. I determined to effect my escape or die in the attempt. I will never re-enter the prison alive! Will you save me? Young as you are, you cannot be wholly devoid of pity, and Heaven knows I stand in need of it now!"

As he speaks he clasps my hand in his burning ones; his handsome, haggard face is upraised imploringly to mine. His story may or may not be true, but it appeals forcibly to my heart.

"I—I don't know," I stammered; "there is the wood-house—"

Again that about, close to the cottage this time. With a look of despair I shall never forget, the convict springs to his feet.

"It is too late!" he moans. "I am trapped!"

"Go in there," I cried, pushing him towards a large cupboard in the parlour, which contains our stock of linen and china, "and leave the rest to me. No, don't shut the door, as he is about to close it after him; leave it ajar."

"You won't betray me?" he whispers.

"No," I replied firmly; then, hurrying into the kitchen beyond, I snatch up a china mug, and take a mean advantage of Scamp, who has followed me in, by closing the kitchen-door upon him, making him a prisoner.

Going out into the front garden I deliberately smash the mug upon the stone pathway. Leaving the pieces there I advance towards the gate.

Here they come, dimly visible through the fog; three, four, five warders in dark blue uniform, each man armed.

I beckon to these big stalwart fellows, and they come hurrying up.

"Have you seen him?" they demanded, simultaneously, "our bird? We know he came this way."

"He was here not five minutes ago," I reply, with a commendable show of agitation. "He came to the door and asked for a drink of water. I was afraid not to give it to him. After drinking, he dashed the mug down—you see the pieces—and went off again at such a speed! He was out of sight in a moment. He frightened me almost to death."

"Which way did he go?" asks the head warden, promptly.

I pointed down the road. The warders, with a parting nod, rush off in that direction after their man, poor deluded mortals, leaving me to my own reflections, not very pleasant ones, just at present.

Half fearfully I re-enter the cottage.

"They are gone," I say, aloud.

My refugee emerges from the cupboard, a grateful expression on his pallid face.

"You have saved me," he murmurs.

"How can I ever thank you? If—"

He pauses abruptly, and sinks into the nearest chair. He is fearfully exhausted, on the verge of a fainting fit. I hurry to the cupboard, uncork Uncle James's bottle of old brandy, kept for medicinal purposes, and pouring some into a wine-glass, hold it to the convict's lips.

The spirit revives him. Presently he is able to take some food and a drink of milk. My heart beats wildly as I watch him, and wonder what will happen next; yet of the convict personally I no longer entertain any dread. His manner has, somehow, dispelled it. I feel convinced that before he became a convict he was a gentleman.

"If I might wash off some of this dust and grime," he says, fully.

I take him into the kitchen and leave him there, releasing Scamp, who has howled melodiously for the last ten minutes. Standing by the front door I look anxiously up and down the road, ready to give the alarm should the warders return this way, a great dread tugging at my heart the while! What if my uncle should return earlier than usual, and find the convict here?

## CHAPTER II.

His toilet, such as it is, completed, he re-entered the sitting-room, his blistered feet causing him to limp painfully.

Yes, this escaped convict is very handsome, decidedly the best-looking man I have as yet encountered. The convict garb





and the close-cropped brown hair cannot conceal his manly beauty of form and feature. His wash has refreshed and invigorated him. His gray eyes are full of resolute purpose again.

"Will you add to the kindness and presence of mind you have already evinced," he asks, "by permitting me to remain here until it grows dusk? In these clothes," the blood rushing to his face as he alludes to them, "I run a fearful risk of detection."

"I am willing to do so," I reply. "—I should be sorry to see you recaptured, although I fear I have done wrong in concealing you. But my uncle will return in a few hours, and he will not hesitate to give you up. He would do it on principle, you know."

A bitter smile curves the convict's well-shaped lips.

"Ah, that word, principle, it is so often misapplied!" he says, quietly. "I have good cause to be thankful that you construe it differently."

"I am sorry for you," I remark, simply. "that is all! You may or may not be guilty; but you are young, and life within the prison walls must be a very dreadful affair."

"I am not guilty," he says, solemnly; "although my innocence may never be vindicated in this world! I am the victim of a base conspiracy on the part of some persons unknown to me. I cannot even fathom their motive in thus fastening a crime upon me, and wrecking my life! Perhaps, should we ever meet again under different circumstances, I may be permitted to tell you more, to convince you that I am indeed innocent. My one chance now lies in escaping to America. Once there, I may assume a fresh identity, and live down the past."

"But in those clothes it seems impossible to escape!" I reply.

While he remains silent, my thoughts are busy. There is a cast-off suit of Uncle James's upstairs. Shall I fill up the measure of my iniquity by allowing the escaped convict to enjoy the possession of these garments? He cannot effect his escape in the dreadful prison dress.

Going upstairs, I fetch the clothes. He accepts them much as a drowning man might clutch at a life-belt thrown at him, and thanks me earnestly for this fresh infraction, on my part, of the law.

Then he retires into the kitchen again to assume his new apparel.

There is one difficulty—he is tall, big made, and broad-shouldered; Uncle James is of the wiry, grasshopper build.

The two men possess but one feature in common, namely—height.

When my strange guest appears rehabilitated, I can scarce suppress a laugh, dangerous as the situation is becoming.

The waistcoat will not meet round him by several inches; the seams of the coat are well-nigh bursting asunder. Its sleeves scarcely permit him to move his arms; they give him the appearance of being trussed.

"I am afraid my rig-out is not everything it might be. No matter, the clothes are a great improvement on those just cast aside. Will you permit me to bury them in the garden?"

I provide him with a spade for that purpose, then make up a little packet of food in readiness for him.

Already it is dark, and Uncle James may return at any moment. Surely the time never flew at such a fearful rate before!

A womanly, helpful instinct, which surprises myself, seems to animate me towards this big, handsome fellow, so entirely dependent upon my aid.

I am neither bashful nor afraid, although my experience of young men has hitherto been of the slightest.

I show him how to ease those lamed,

blistered feet by passing a darning needle filled with grey worsted through the blisters.

I give him the packet of food, and press my half-guinea—my previous quarter's dress allowance, received only last week—into his hand. I insist upon his taking it, although he demurs.

"It is mine; and you can do nothing without money," I remark, in a tone of profound wisdom.

"Some day I will endeavour to repay it," he says, passionate gratitude rendering his voice hoarse and broken; "but your kindness—I shall never attempt to cancel that debt. Child, you have taught me that human nature is not utterly false and cruel, and heartless, that it admits of some exceptions. My brave little preserver, whatever the fate in store for me, your image will remain imprinted on my heart as long as I live!"

He lifts my hand to his lips and kisses it tenderly, respectfully. My eyes grow suddenly dim with unshed tears.

"Heaven grant that you may succeed in escaping!" I murmur.

"Will you tell me the name of the girl to whom I am so deeply indebted?" he asks.

"Stella Brookfield."

"You have indeed proved yourself to be my good star," he says, earnestly. "Over yonder, at the prison, I was merely a number—ninety-seven. Now I am a man again. You will think sometimes of Julian Tressider, and remember him in your prayers!"

Julian Tressider! If I could but foresee how that name is destined to haunt me through the months and years yet to come!

It is quite dark now, yet he will succeed in getting away in that ill-fitting suit; which says so plainly that it was never made for him? It is only a shade less noticeable than his convict dress. As he turns to go a sudden inspiration seizes me. Bidding him wait a moment I dart upstairs, and commence to rummage wildly in a large old chest in the spare room, a "mistletoe bough" sort of chest, which is rarely opened.

If fifty warders had formed a circle around our cottage ten minutes later, armed to the teeth, they would have beheld no convict issuing forth from it. The only person who crosses the threshold, on her way home, is an old village woman, dressed in rusty black and poke bonnet, carrying a latch-key and a market basket. I bid her good-night at the door, and she replies in cracked, quivering tones. Then I close the door and sit down to await my uncle's return. He may come as soon as he likes now.

My nerves have been terribly shaken during his brief absence, and the solitude is becoming unbearable.

"They tell me a convict has escaped to-day," he remarks, as I help him off with his overcoat, and prepare his supper.

"Yes; and he came here!" I reply, boldly taking the conventional bull by the horns.

"Here!"

Uncle James's scanty grey hair stands well-nigh erect on his head. His long, thin features, which he is in the habit of contracting nervously, twitch in all directions at my information.

"I am thankful that the fellow made no attempt to injure you, Stella, or to rob the house!" he remarks, as he sits down to supper; "very thankful. You shall never be left quite by yourself after this. The desperate villain! I sincerely hope they have captured him by this time, and that he is safely lodged in the prison again."

I do not echo this sentiment. I trust—oh, how fervently!—that Julian Tressider will succeed in effecting his escape.

My complicity is not likely to be dis-

covered unless Uncle James should ask for his cast-off suit, which is most improbable. He certainly eyes the joint, cut down close to the bone, suspiciously, and makes a sarcastic comment on my healthy appetite; but no idea of the truth dawns upon his mind, and I am thankful.

Three, four, five days go by, and Julian Tressider is still at large. They have scoured Dartmoor in search of him, but to no purpose. I begin to breathe freely again. Perhaps, by this time, he is on his way to America. If so, am I ever fated to see him again?

A strange restlessness takes possession of me as the quiet, uneventful day glides by, in such marked contrast to the one exciting incident that has ever varied my dull life. This restlessness takes a new form. Previously it was a vague, general yearning for change and action of some kind. Now my thoughts concentrate themselves upon Julian Tressider. He occupies my mind exclusively. I am even conscious of an intense yearning to see him again, to learn how fortune is treating him. Existence in this out-of-the-way place seems more unbearable than ever.

Scamp and I start out for a long ramble by ourselves one fine morning. The dying splendours of October are all around us. The wide moors are aflame with brilliant, orange-tinted bracken. I mean to climb to the very top one of the steep tors in order to enjoy a splendid prospect. Half way up the rugged grass-grown path I sit down to rest and look about me, while Scamp darts off on an excursion of his own. I have no actual troubles to oppress me, yet, as I sit there with the soft breeze blowing on my face, and the blue sky far above, unbidden tears come rustling to my eyes, a yearning I cannot control fills my heart.

"Oh, if he were only here—if I could see him but for a moment," I cry, mentally, "it would ease this dull, constant pain."

"Miss Brookfield!"

I spring up with a little cry and look round, to find, standing close beside me, a tall man with dark hair, and a long dark beard. He must have approached me by another path. I have never seen him before, yet surely the voice is familiar!

As I gaze at him somewhat apprehensively he smiles. Hair and beard disappear, and my heart gives a great bound that well-nigh stifles me, as he stands there in the radiant sunlight. It is Julian Tressider!

"Mr Tressider!" I exclaim.

"I hope I have not frightened you?" he says, reassuringly. "I have waited so long for this opportunity of seeing and speaking to you again. I feared it would never arrive."

"But what, madness," I remonstrate, "after getting away to return to Dartmoor again. I thought you had sailed ere this!"

"I could not go to America until I had thanked you once more," he said, earnestly. "I owe my escape to you, remember—to your sympathy, your presence of mind."

So it is for my sake that he has run this fearful risk of detection and recapture. Somehow I forgot to blame him. Sitting on one of the granite boulders that strew the hilltop—we have climbed higher up—he tells me that a friend, who believes firmly in his innocence, has supplied him with funds to enable him to go to America. His passage is already taken, and three days hence he will bid good-bye to England.

A strange sense of having known him for a long while, of being perfectly familiar with him, possesses me. I listen to his plans, as he unfolds them, with deepest interest.

"I should feel comparatively happy," he says, in conclusion, "even with that unfinished sentence still hanging over my

head, "if you could but be persuaded to believe in my innocence, to regard me as sinned against, not sinning. Will you listen to my version of the crime wrongly imputed to me?"

My silence gives consent. He proceeds to tell me about the forged notes found in his possession when, an accusation having been laid against him by some persons unknown, the detectives came to search his rooms, his utter inability to account for their presence, his vain attempt to clear himself from such a charge, his subsequent misery; and when he concludes, I am no longer in doubt respecting his innocence or guilt.

"If the whole world adjudged you guilty," I say, firmly, "after what you have just told me I should continue to believe in your innocence."

He turns away for a moment to conceal his emotion—he cannot speak.

"Will you give me some little thing that you have worn as a keepsake?" he asks, pleadingly, ere we part.

I untie the little silk handkerchief from around my neck, and hand it to him in silence. Another moment, and he is walking rapidly away, in and out among the granite boulders, and I am alone.

### CHAPTER III.

Two months have elapsed since I parted from Julian Tressider on the grey rugged tor—two long dreary months. It is now mid-winter. He promised ere we parted to inform me by some means of his arrival in America; but I have received no communication from him as yet.

The dreadful truth must be told. I have been compelled to admit it to myself. I am in love with this man, whom I have seen but twice, this escaped convict, who owes his deliverance to me.

I believe firmly in his innocence. Julian Tressider could not, I feel convinced, have stooped to commit crime, especially such a crime as that wrongly imputed to him.

If I am fated to live fifty years longer in this desolate place I shall never experience for any other man the passionate love which he has, all unconsciously, aroused within my breast.

Forces hitherto dormant have been aroused, never to slumber again. I am no longer a girl. I have crossed the boundary line, and become a woman, with all a woman's faculty for loving, suffering, and rejoicing.

Until lately I had not even guessed at the existence of such deep tumultuous feeling—such intense emotion in my nature—a complete outgoing of all self towards the man I love. It has taken me, by surprise. I hardly seem to recognise myself under this new, changed aspect.

Only to be near him—to share his life, however rough and toilsome—to feel that I was dear and necessary to him—would mean bliss beyond the power of words to describe.

But I am nothing to him, I reflect miserably. He will soon forget me out there, or remember me only with a little gratitude as the girl who once aided him in a sore emergency.

Why, even if my love were requited, Julian Tressider, with that undeserved star upon his name, the penalty of the law still awaiting him should he be rearrested, would never dream of avowing his passion, and asking me to become his wife. My love is virtually hopeless.

"Miss Brookfield, your solo comes next!"

I awake with a start from the reverie into which I had fallen, and give my full attention to the choir-master, for I am

attending a week-night practice of the choir of which I am a member.

"Oh, for the wings of a dove!"

As my voice floats upwards the yearning pathetic words, wedded to exquisite music, seem to embody my own wistful longings and aspirations. The dull pain at my heart grows lighter. The anthem carries me out of myself. I forget my sorrow as I sing. The rich, full, long-sustained notes ring through the empty church.

Not until I resume my seat, after receiving an approving nod from the choir-master, do I become aware of the presence of a stranger in the church.

He is a little man, stout and dark. He wears a long rich sealskin overcoat, calculated to arouse envy in the breast of each female present, and a diamond ring sparkles on the little finger of his left hand. He has the appearance of a foreigner or "professional" of some kind.

What has brought him to this out-of-the-way spot, to listen to the crude singing of a village choir? The same question seems to be agitating the minds of the other members as they glance curiously at him.

Choir-practice over, the stranger comes boldly forward and addresses the Vicar. The two converse together for several moments; the unknown produces his card. I have taken leave of the others, and am about to quit the church, when the Vicar calls me back.

"Stella, my dear," he says, a perplexed expression upon his kind, homely face, "this gentleman has expressed a wish to be introduced to you. Miss Brookfield, Professor Paoli."

The Professor bows low and compliments me upon my singing in broken English, glancing keenly at me the while, with his small, deep-set, brilliant dark eyes.

"Professor Paoli," continues the Vicar, "is, I need hardly tell you, well-known in the musical world. Some of our most famous singers were formerly among his pupils. He has been induced to come down here on the strength of a representation made to him by a friend staying here in the autumn. This gentleman was so much impressed with your singing, Stella, that he mentioned it to Signor Paoli; hence his presence here to-day."

"And I am quite ready to endorse my friend's assertion," interposed the little Italian. "The young lady has a splendid voice, but it is sadly in need of training. Mees Brookfield," he continues, "with that voice it is a mistake for you to remain here in obscurity, wasting the time which should be spent in hard study, previous to your appearance in public. I, Paoli, tell you that you possess a fortune in your voice. Moreover, I am willing to accept you as my pupil, to bring you out two years hence upon the operatic stage, should you and your friends consent to such an arrangement."

For a moment I cannot reply. The dazzling prospect thus unexpectedly opened up before me has taken away my breath.

To be told that I possess an unusual gift, to be offered the means of developing it by one so competent to form an opinion as Professor Paoli, is to be favoured indeed!

Delirious visions of wealth and fame, of a reunion with Julian Tressider, flit through my mind, as I stand there, confronting the two men.

"You would not object to become rich—famous, a *prima donna*, with diamonds that an empress might envy?" asks the Professor, a gleam of amusement in his dark eyes. "Only I warn you before the triumph comes much hard work; and you are beginning late!"

"Object!" I exclaim, a little catch in my voice. "I will study night and day to attain such a result. I cannot thank you sufficiently for the generous offer just made. It is what I have most longed for ever since I knew I could sing. Do you think" appealing to the Vicar, "that my uncle will give his consent to such an arrangement?"

"He is certain to raise objections to it, Stella. The appearance in public would offend his most cherished prejudices. Never mind, child! Don't look so bitterly disappointed. The Professor and I will walk home with you, and lay the proposal before him. You must, of course, abide by your uncle's decision, whichever way it turns!"

Oh! that suspenseful walk across the moors, in the direction of our cottage! My nerves are at high tension. If only Uncle James will consent to my becoming the Professor's pupil, good-bye to dulness and ennui. Life will have commenced for me in earnest at last.

Uncle James receives us in his small study. His long, narrow face looks terribly unpromising as he listens to the Professor's favourable account of my voice, and the rare opportunity of turning it to advantage that he is willing to accord me. My heart sinks lower and lower as I see his features begin to twitch irascibly—a sure sign that he is displeased.

"You ask me, sir," he says, addressing the Professor, "if I will allow my niece to commence a course of study under your auspices, with a view to her becoming a public singer, and my answer is, no—decidedly no. I would as soon permit her to become a circus-rider."

"The two professions admit of no comparison," retorts the Italian. He is fiery, my uncle irascible. The Vicar strives, in vain, to throw oil on the troubled waters. They go at it hammer and tongs. The Professor argues, expostulates, entreats, all to no purpose. Uncle James will not budge an inch from the position he has taken up, and which his natural obstinacy renders still more impregnable. When I venture to add my entreaties to those of the Italian, I am promptly told to hold my tongue.

"Sir, you are not justified in withholding such a superb voice from the public, to whom it really belongs," exclaims the Professor, as a parting shot.

"Sir, so far as I and my niece are concerned, the public may be—"

Here the Vicar stirs the fire energetically, and the remainder of the sentence is lost to posterity. Five minutes later he has quitted our cottage, accompanied by the Professor, and my disappointment finds vent in a fit of hysterical weeping.

My uncle standing on the hearthrug, his legs wide apart, his scanty hair, through which he has repeatedly run his fingers, in his excitement, combed bolt upright, regards me sarcastically.

"If you are bent upon making that noise, Stella," he says, with ironical politeness, "oblige me by going to your own room, where you can keep it up as long as you like without fear of interruption. Upon my word," addressing an imaginary audience, "this girl's ingratitude surpasses everything. I board, lodge, clothe, and educate her for a number of years; we reside constantly beneath the same roof. Yet she is ready to leave me at a moment's notice—at the invitation of a play-acting foreigner, of whom she knows simply nothing—just because he has flattered her vanity, and made her a few specious promises. Ye Gods! and this is what you may expect to receive in return for bringing up another man's child!"

Beneath his sarcastic vein I detect a



certain amount of hurt feeling. Is it possible that I have wounded him? Some of my angry, resentful disappointment dies out at the thought.

"Uncle James, I should have asked you to come and live near to me in London, that we might not be separated," I reply, through my sobs. "I had no idea of leaving you. Such a splendid career might have opened out before me had you but accepted Professor Paoli's offer. Think how many books I could have bought for you when I began to earn money?"

I am afraid this is by no means a disinterested reminder. Uncle James merely grins at it, and goes back to his favourite Horace, while I fling myself out of the study in a very bad frame of mind indeed.

I am glad, so glad, afterwards, that I kiss him ere going to bed at night, although it costs me a struggle to conquer my resentment and do so.

When I awake the next morning, with a sense of deep depression, I go downstairs to find our little maid busy, but my uncle has not put in an appearance. What can make him, the soul of punctuality, so late?

I get my breakfast, still he fails to come down. Can he be ill? Growing somewhat alarmed, I go to the door of his room and knock. There is no response.

Opening the door I glance half fearfully inside; the room is empty. Going through it I enter the little study beyond. Uncle James is seated in his elbow chair, with his back to me, in precisely the same attitude as when I quitted him last night.

He neither moves nor speaks when I address him. Thrilled through and through with sudden terror, I summon up my courage, and approach him.

One glance is sufficient to tell me what has happened. A visitor, whom no bolts or bars ever forged can keep out, has entered our house silently during the night. My only relative, my solitary friend and protector, Uncle James, is dead!

#### CHAPTER IV.

It is some time ere I recover from the shock of this sudden bereavement. Heart-disease, quite unsuspected by the sufferer, has carried Uncle James off. I miss him terribly. I never really knew how much I cared for him until now.

Uncle James's annuity, of course, died with him, leaving me unprovided for. The small sum of money realised by the sale of our furniture is all to which I can lay claim.

Pending the settlement of my very modest affairs, I am invited to stay at the Vicarage. After the funeral and the sale, the question of my future has to be faced. How am I, left entirely dependent upon my own exertions at the age of seventeen, to earn a livelihood?

The choice lies between a situation as nursery governess, at twelve pounds a-year salary, or the acceptance of Professor Paoli's offer.

With scarcely a moment's hesitation I decide in favour of the latter. Surely if my uncle could know now how I am placed he would not censure me for so doing!

I write to the Professor explaining my altered circumstances, and expressing my willingness to become his pupil. Then I await the reply with what patience I can command.

Signor Paoli answers my letter in person. I am afraid that poor Uncle James's death is to him a cause of rejoicing rather than regret, since it enables me to accept his offer, to fall in with his views for me.

A formal agreement is drawn up, subject to the Vicar's approval. Signor Paoli undertakes to furnish me with board, residence,

and dress during the next two years, while my education is in progress.

After that, when I have made my *début*, he reserves to himself the right of forming my engagements and receiving two-thirds of any salary I may earn for a space of three years, to reimburse him for the expense he will have been at.

For the next five years I pledge myself not to sing in public without his consent. The agreement is a very just one, and I sign it without the least hesitation.

Three days later I quit Dartmoor for London, accompanied by my master. He has a house in Belgravia, and I am to live there with Signor Paoli and his wife.

My eyes fill with tears as I gaze my last on the wide-swelling moorlands, the breezy rugged tors, which I have so often climbed, and the lonely cottage I once called home.

I am conscious of a feeling of affection for it. It is associated in my mind with Julian Tressider. It has ceased to be hateful to me on this account. I shall always think of him in connection with the moor country, and a sharp sense of pain pierces my heart as we leave it behind. The last link that bound me to the old life is severed now.

Once arrived in London, however, I have but little time to indulge in reveries or regrets. My musical education begins in earnest, and the Professor, although kind, is a very strict taskmaster. So many hours a-day are devoted to singing lessons, so many to stage deportment and the rudiments of the histrionic art. I work and study with a will, however, spurred on by a secret motive too sacred to be revealed to anyone else.

Fame, if I can compass it, will involve wealth, and wealth means power. It may enable me to seek out Julian Tressider, to place him in a position to establish his innocence, to look the world boldly in the face again. It is this wild, far-fetched hope which alone renders me so greedy of success.

My love for Julian Tressider has taken firm hold of me. He is still first in my heart and my thoughts, still my king among men, although no word comes to break the cruel silence enshrouding his fate. New surroundings and acquaintances have in no wise tended to weaken or divert the passionate, silent love I entertain for him. I could not be faithless to his memory if I tried. For joy or for sorrow my heart has gone out into his keeping, and some voice keeps whispering to me that we are fated to meet again.

Life in London flows with a brisk, rapid current, a perfect contrast to the sluggish existence on Dartmoor. The days seem all too short for the work that has to be crowded into them, and the occasional pleasures that fall to my share.

The Professor expresses himself satisfied with my progress. He knows that I strain every nerve to realise his expectations, while looking forward to my *début* with mingled dread and delight.

"You will never set the Thames on fire as an actress," he remarks one day, "but your voice improves rapidly; and, after all, in opera the acting is only a secondary consideration; the singing is of paramount importance."

"Does she look as if I beat, starved, or overworked her?" demands the Professor, one day at luncheon, when the question is being discussed between them. The Signora wishes to take me with her to an evening party. Her husband demurs. He fears late hours for me, and a possible cold.

His wife carries her point, however, and carries me off later on, in triumph, to the

party. By this time I know a number of people. I thoroughly appreciate the pleasant society, literary, artistic, Bohemian, the clever genial men and women, some of them world-renowned, whom I am in the habit of meeting at home, and when I accompany the Signora to other houses.

The drawing-room of the celebrated portrait painter, whose guests we are to-night, is quite full when the Signora and I enter it. They are about to commence dancing. The Signora, magnificent in velvet and old point, subsides into a low, comfortable basket chair. I, gowned in simple white, with a few flowers as my only ornament, sit beside her.

Presently a gentleman comes up and greets the Signora in a manner that betokens him to be a familiar acquaintance. He glances in my direction, and she forthwith introduces us.

Five minutes later I am dancing with this new acquaintance, whose waltzing leaves nothing to be desired. Our dance over, he leads me back to my seat and draws another close to it, evidently bent upon conversation. A stately dowager has engrossed the Signora's attention, so we are quite undisturbed.

Sir Percy Delahaye is a tall man of eight-and-twenty or thirty, with clear-cut, handsome features, brilliant dark eyes, a clear brown complexion, and dark hair and moustache. An indefinable air of good breeding distinguished the young Baronet, yet I feel by no means attracted towards him. On the contrary, he inspires me with a sense of repulsion. There is a sinister gleam in those brilliant dark eyes of his, a mocking curve of the thin, well-shaped lips, that repels me instinctively.

Yet his manner is suave, courteous, high-bred, and the conversation he maintains with me is not lacking in interest.

"Six months hence, Miss Brookfield," he says, in allusion to my first appearance in public, "the world will be at your feet. You will have taken it by storm. Signor Paoli's pupils are always a success, and you will form no exception to the general rule. I have displayed consummate wisdom in making your acquaintance previous to your *début*. I can only hope you will not ignore me later on, when you are in universal request."

I laugh and blush. The admiration in his eyes is so obvious.

"You are far more likely to forget me," I reply; "and my success is not likely to be on a large scale, especially at first."

"To forget you would be impossible," says Sir Percy, decisively, "unless a man had lost his memory altogether. I shall be present on your first night, ready to lead the applause."

"I hope I shall not suffer from stage-fright," I continue. "That would be dreadful, after all the pains Signor Paoli has taken with me."

"No, you will rise to the occasion," he rejoins, regarding me keenly as he speaks.

"If I am not mistaken, you would rather die than fall in anything you attempted. Did I understand from the Signora that you had not always lived in London?"

"Yes, until quite recently Dartmoor was my home," I answer. "I lived there with my uncle."

"Ah, a dreary sort of place, Dartmoor," says Sir Percy, languidly; "generally associated in the public mind with convicts, a big prison, stone-breaking, and that sort of thing."

Again the swift blood rushes to my face. I feel inclined to resent Sir Percy's careless allusion to convicts, for Julian Tressider's sake. Yet this is absurd, for, of course, he cannot guess how sensitive I am upon this subject.

"Some parts of Dartmoor are very lovely," I reply, "and the prison was at least five miles off from our house."

"I have heard," he resumes, in a low, penetrating tone, intended for my ear alone, "that strange things happen on Dartmoor; quite phenomenal occurrences. For instance, suits of convicts' clothes have been dug up in cottage-gardens, in lieu of potatoes. Infirmary old women have been seen to leap a stile at night with the ease and agility of a young man. Possibly the bracing air may account for the old lady's acrobatic feat; but the clothes must need remain an unsolved mystery. Botany refuses to account for them."

As he speaks I half rise from my seat. I gaze at him with astonished, dilated eyes. Those brilliant orbs of his seem to burn me as they rest upon my guilty, conscious face; a little mocking smile curves the Baronet's lips.

By what means has he become possessed of those dangerous facts, which I thought were known only to Julian Tressider, and what use does he intend to make of his knowledge?

"What do you mean?" I gasp. "I—I don't understand!"

"Of course not," he replies lightly, a mocking inflection in his voice; "how should you? I was wrong to speak in riddles. These things which occurred on Dartmoor are hardly worth mention, save as local phenomena."

He changes the subject adroitly, yet I feel convinced that he knows the exact part I took in aiding Julian Tressider to escape, and that he has purposely led up to these remarks.

Does he intend to hold his knowledge over me, to impress me with a sense of the power he wields—the penalty he can, if he likes, bring down upon me.

My spirit rises at this idea. I set him quietly at defiance by refusing to give him any more dances, and saying at little as possible to him during the rest of the evening.

"Who is Sir Percy Delahaye?" I enquire of the Signora, during our home ward drive. He belongs to a very old Staffordshire family," is the reply. "He has only recently succeeded to the estate. It is a very poor property. Beyond the title and the estate there was little for him to inherit. But I hear that, a year or two previous, a distant relative bequeathed him a legacy of ninety thousand pounds. I am glad of it. Sir Percy is a clever, agreeable young man. He ought to make his way in the world."

I do not echo the favourable opinion of the Baronet. I lie awake half the night wondering how he became possessed of my secret, and what use he will make of it.

I am fated to see a great deal more of Sir Percy Delahaye. He calls frequently at the Paolis' residence after our first meeting. He pays me marked attentions. Hothouse flowers and fruits, new music, tickets for concerts and operas are among the offerings I receive from him. I would fain refuse them all, disliking and doubting the man as I do, yet he offers them so openly, he makes so little secret of his predilection for me, that I cannot even resent either the attention or the gifts without offending the Paolis.

Sir Percy makes no further allusion to the episode on Dartmoor. He never attempts to lead up to it again after the first occasion, and I am at a loss to understand his silence, or to ascertain how much he knows respecting Julian Tressider's antecedents.

Fortunately, for me, the Professor becomes alarmed as the Baronet's attentions to me grow more obvious. He fears lest we should fall in love, lest Sir Percy

should ask me to become his wife, and thereby put an end to my projected public career.

Once alive to this possibility, the Professor manoeuvres to keep us apart, an attempt in which I gladly aid and abet him. Yet even now I have to endure Sir Percy's society far too frequently for my peace of mind.

As the time appointed for my *debut* draws nigh my suspense increases. To fail now would be terrible indeed. I am to make my first appearance at Covent Garden in a new opera by one of the most eminent of modern composers. The principal role in it is not, of course, assigned to me. A queen of song has consented to take it. Mine is only a secondary part, yet of sufficient importance to render my success or failure in it decisive.

The eventful night arrives. The fact has been generally circulated in musical circles that a pupil of Signor Paoli's is to make her *debut* in the new opera entitled *Paulina*. A cultivated critical audience, accustomed to the finished efforts of the most talented artists, fills the vast opera-house. These men and women are in reality my judges, yet I do not lose nerve. I have so much at stake that I feel strung up to do my utmost to avoid failure.

My nerves are at high tension as I leave the dressing-room.

I hear my name called: I advance on to the stage. For the first time I stand there, facing the footlights and that vast, silent audience.

I try to forget that sea of faces, to concentrate my thoughts upon the character I am personating—that of a child who rescues the man she loves from a position of extreme peril.

It bears some analogy, perhaps, to the episode on Dartmoor in which I figured once. At any rate, I throw myself into it with a force, a realism, that carries all before it.

I render the music allotted to me as if the passionate words came straight from my heart.

As I sing my courage rises with my voice. As if in a dream I hear the ringing plaudits, and dimly understand they are intended for me.

I respond to the *encore* clamorously demanded.

When the queen of song has received her usual ovation I am called before the curtain to receive yet another round of encouraging applause, and the most superb bouquet that falls at my feet comes from the box in which Sir Percy Delahaye is seated with a party of friends.

I feel dizzy, confused, exhausted, as someone leads me off.

The Professor, beside himself with delight and satisfaction, takes me in his arms and kisses me in demonstrative Italian fashion. Then he hands me over to the Signora, and I am promptly conveyed home, weary, but, oh! so thankful and triumphant. Only one regret lessens the joy consequent upon my success—that Julian Tressider was not there to witness it.

#### CHAPTER V.

My success is an established fact. The critics have reviewed me favourably. One even alludes to me as a new star in the operatic firmament.

I still study hard beneath the Professor's tuition, yet the attributes of success are mine, and I am very happy.

Potted, fêted, caressed, with more than one possible lover, only the absence of any knowledge respecting Julian Tressider's fate tends to darken the sunlight now flooding my life with its radiance.

Strange as it may seem, my love for him

grows stronger and deeper, although we have met but twice, and neither word nor token from him has come to help keep it alive.

For his dear sake the tender, persuasive speeches uttered by other lips fall flat and unmeaning upon my ear. The admiration and love for myself which I read in other men's eyes fail to evoke any responsive thrill.

My stage name, by which the public recognise me, is Beatrice D'Artois. When I read it extensively advertised in the newspapers, and upon street hoardings and sandwich-boards, I can hardly realize that it belongs to me, Stella Brookfield.

Ere many weeks have elapsed the Professor's fears are verified—Sir Philip Delahaye proposes to me.

I soon set them at rest again, however, by rejecting the Baronet as decisively as possible. I tell him that we can never be any more to each other than we are at present.

His dark, handsome face grows livid as he listens to my words.

"Stella, I love you!" he says, passionately; "and I have never allowed any obstacle to stand between me and the object of my desire. Sooner or later I shall overcome your objections, and you will consent to share my life. You are the first, the only woman I have ever sought to marry, and I shall not lightly relinquish you!"

"Then it is to be a trial of strength between your will and mine!" I answer defiantly. "I shall come off victor, Sir Percy—not you—in this contest."

He regards me with an angry, lowering expression. He would fain prolong the discussion, but the Signora's, to me, welcome, entrance puts a stop to it. A kind of armed neutrality is established between the Baronet and myself, after this. I know he is on the look-out for an opportunity to renew his suit, and I do my utmost to prevent it from arriving.

The London season over, I enjoy a much needed rest. The Paolis take me with them to a quiet French watering-place for a month. When the Professor informs me, one morning, that he is in correspondence with a well-known operatic manager who intends to organise a powerful company for a tour through South America, my heart bounds with wild sudden hope.

Julian Tressider went to America. What if I am destined to meet him there? True, America is a wide place, but distance cannot alter the decrees of fate, and I have become strongly impregnated with fatalism of late.

I express my willingness to accept the proffered engagement to travel with the company now being formed. The preliminaries with regard to salary, travelling expenses, and so on, being arranged to Signor Paoli's satisfaction, I sign the agreement, and the Signora busies herself in preparing for my departure.

The Professor places me in the care of the manager's wife, a pleasant middle-aged lady—non-professional—who is to accompany us. Our repertoire is a large and varied one. I am expected to sustain several of the leading roles. My fame has gone before me across the Atlantic, and I have now a reputation to uphold. I study hard during the voyage out, the sweet, secret hope of once more encountering the man I love ever resting at my heart.

South America, when reached, seems to me an earthly paradise. The deep blue skies, the radiant sunlight, the picturesque scenery, inspire me with a sense of renewed, intensified life. Large audiences await us in every town, and I win fresh laurels. Indeed, ours may be called a triumphal progress, so favourable is the reception



accorded to us. I like these large-hearted, kindly, albeit critical Americans, who offer me fresh homage, yet I am very far from feeling happy. Every night I scan the audience eagerly from the stage to see if I can discern Julian Tressider's face among those present. Every night I am doomed to suffer a fresh disappointment.

To my bitter annoyance, Sir Percy Delahaye, who is well known to the manager, joined us unexpectedly in New Orleans. He announces his intention of accompanying us to Florida, where, as he avers, capital sport is to be had, both large and small game abounding.

He is but an indifferent sportsman. I recognise this to be merely an excuse. I am responsible for his trip to America, and the knowledge that he has arrived to inflict his unwelcome society upon me again, when I had congratulated myself at having got rid of him for a long period, renders the Baronet more hateful to me than ever. I am fearful lest any scandal should attach itself to my name through his rash act in coming out after me. By way of reprisal I shun and avoid him. I gave him plainly to understand that his suit is hopeless; yet he is persistent, and refuses to be shaken off.

Florida is reached at length, beautiful Florida, the land of perpetual summer. I am in a state of constant wonder and admiration! The balmy air, the delicious foliage, the plantations of oranges and bananas, the gorgeous-hued birds, the tropical glow and richness of the flowers and fruits, dazzle and enchant me. I had no idea, until now, that any part of the world could be so passing fair.

Our company is staying for a week only in a large flourishing town, with a fine old cathedral built by the Spaniards. The opera, *Don Giovanni*, is over, but, in response to a flattering ovation, I come forward again, and the familiar melody of "Home Sweet Home," rings through the vast building.

I have reached the last verse, my audience sits listening as if spell-bound. Suddenly I falter. I have caught sight of a face in the crowd, a bronzed, handsome face, prayed for, longed for, waited for, come at last. It is the face of Julian Tressider!

Our eyes meet in swift, silent recognition. What is it that sends such a sharp arrow of pain through my heart? Beside Julian Tressider sits a girl whose rich dress of dark, queenly, tropical beauty single her out for especial notice.

With an effort I regain my self-control. I finish my song, then, faint, bewildered, heartsick, I quit the stage.

Julian Tressider's possible engagement or marriage has, oddly enough, until now never once crossed my mind. I have always pictured him in my dreams as a lonely, isolated man, in need of love and sympathy. Now the bitter disillusion is almost more than I can bear. Who is that girl, and what in relation does she stand to him?

Sir Percy Delahaye, who makes a point of being present at each performance, has recognised Julian Tressider. He followed the direction of my eyes, and understood at once the cause of my agitation.

I saw his dark face blanch; I detected the evil glance he threw at Tressider, a glance full of hatred and menace. For some reason he is the latter's enemy, while he knows enough, if he pleases, to denounce Julian Tressider, and give him up to justice as an escaped convict.

By some means I must warn the man I love of this threatened danger; then, at any cost, tear his image from my heart, since he has all too quickly forgotten me.

That lovely girl, his wife, perhaps, must for ever stand between us. What have I

left to live for, I moan as I fling myself down on the floor of my room, and give way to a fit of passionate weeping that leaves me faint and trembling in every limb.

Will Julian Tressider seek an interview with me, I wonder, the next morning? If not, how am I to find him, to warn him against Sir Percy's probable machinations? Can—

"If you please, miss, a gentleman wishes to see you," said my maid, entering the room at this moment. "He is waiting downstairs. He told me to give you his card."

The name engraved on the visiting card is Frank Rutledge, yet I feel certain it is no other than he. My heart beats fiercely as I go downstairs to the hotel sitting room.

A tall, stalwart, handsome man comes forward to meet me. It is, indeed, Julian Tressider, like and yet so unlike the haggard fugitive from justice I befriended once on Dartmoor.

He is well-dressed; his face is bronzed, a long drooping brown moustache partly conceals the mobile, sensitive lips. He looks and speaks with an air of manly confidence. He holds out both hands to me as I approach him, and I cannot refrain from taking them.

"Then you—you recognised me last night?" I say, confusedly.

"Yes," he replies, his voice hoarse with emotion. "As soon as you appeared upon the stage I knew you. It was, indeed, a surprise, a bewildering surprise, to identify the famous singer, Beatrice D'Artois, with Miss Brookfield, of Dartmoor! You are not angry with me for seeking you out? I could not stay away."

"No, I thought you would come," I continue, with forced composure. "He shall never, never learn the pain I have suffered on his account. I wished to see you, Mr. —"

"Rutledge!" he interposes. "You know why I am not free to use my own name."

"Yes, oh, yes! I wished to warn you against a possible danger. Sir Percy Delahaye is here. He has recognised you, and I have every reason to believe he bears you some ill-will for which you can doubtless account."

"Delahaye!" he says, musingly. "I knew him before he inherited his title, but only as an ordinary acquaintance. We never disagreed. Even if he has recognised me, I fail to see why he should do me such an ill turn as to denounce me!"

"He is well acquainted with the details of your escape," I reply, repeating to him the allusions to Dartmoor made by Sir Percy on a previous occasion. "That he is your enemy also, I feel convinced."

"It is very strange. I cannot understand it at all," remarks Julian Tressider, a clouded expression crossing his face. "How could these incidents have become known to him? I did not once encounter Delahaye after my escape. Had I done so, no allusion to the aid you rendered me would have crossed my lips. I would have died sooner than implicate you in any way. I cannot account for this supposed enmity of his. What," with a sudden change of tone, "is he doing here now?"

"Enjoying the good sport that Florida affords, I believe; that, at least, is the reason he assigned in joining us," I answer, indifferently.

"It is hard, fearfully hard, to treat him with studied coldness, to keep him at arm's length, while his eyes are full of silent pleading and entreaty. Yet I call to mind that dark, lovely girl, his companion of last night, and steel my heart against him."

"Are you certain that he is not your lover?" Julian Tressider asks, abruptly, imperiously, wincing as he pronounces the word.

"Mr. Tressider!" I exclaim, proudly, "that is not a permissible question. My private affairs can hardly possess any great interest for you!"

My words wound him so deeply that I regret them as soon as uttered.

"Forgive me," he says, humbly. "For a moment I had forgotten my wretched position. I dared to address you as an equal."

"It is not that," I reply, hastily, unable to explain my resentment, which springs from such a different cause. "Tell me something about yourself. How has the world treated you since our last meeting?"

"I am as far off as ever from being able to prove my innocence of the crime for which I was sentenced," he says, quietly. "In other respects, however, things have prospered with me. On coming out here I made the acquaintance of a Mr. Strongford, who owns a large sugar plantation about five miles out. He took a fancy to me, engaged me as overseer and general manager, and I have remained with him ever since. He knows there is a secret connected with my past history, but he never attempts to inquire into it. Strongford is a good fellow, and we are the best of friends. That was his only daughter, Kate, you saw at the theatre with me last night."

"She is very beautiful," I remark.

"Yes, Kate can count her lovers by the score," he continues, carelessly; then turning to me with a sudden, passionate gesture, he cries, "Stella—Miss Brookfield, what has come between us to render this meeting such a bitter disappointment? If you could but know how, by day and night, in pain and weariness, in moments of perfidy, in long lonely watches, your image has been present with me, cheering, consoling, nerving me to fresh efforts, in the hope of one day beholding you again, I think you would accord me a little more warmth and sympathy now!"

I remain silent. Why should he crave for my sympathy when he was *hers*?

"I understand now," he resumes, in a tone of bitter resignation. "Time, success, fame, have changed your attitude towards me. You no longer believe in my innocence as you did that day on Dartmoor. You regret the noble, impulsive act that won my freedom for me; you regard it now as rash and ill-advised. I might have expected this, and yet—Farewell, Miss Brookfield, I shall never inflict my unwelcome presence upon you again."

He turned to go, I cannot, I dare not, remain silent beneath this false accusation, or suffer him to retain such a wrong impression of me. He has compelled me to speak.

"Stop!" I cry, brokenly, "you are altogether wrong. I believe in your innocence as firmly as ever. I regret nothing; yet why should you value my good opinion so highly? Miss Strongford's should surely be all-sufficient for you."

A comprehensive look dawns in Julian Tressider's handsome grey eyes. He is beside me again, bending over me, his warm breath fans my cheek.

"Kate Strongford is nothing to me," he says, earnestly, "nor ever will be. At least, you shall learn the truth, Stella, though I have vowed never to reveal it. From the time of our first meeting I have loved you and you alone. Hopelessly separated as we are by fate I shall continue to love you to the end."

As he speaks our eyes meet in a glance more eloquent than any words. Julian Tressider starts as if at an unexpected revelation. Half consciously he opens his arms. The next moment I am folded to his

breast, steeped in purest bliss, sobbing out in that safe shelter the story of the love so long entertained for him, the cherished hope that we might be fated to meet again. Strong man as he is I can feel him tremble as he listens.

"My darling, my little love!" he exclaims, "this more than compensates me for all I have suffered! I had not dared to hope for such a surpassing joy!"

His kisses fall like rain upon my drooping face. Enfolded within his arms a sense of perfect peace and happiness replaces the vague yearning, the intense loneliness, of the last three years.

I inform him, in answer to his eager questions, of the events of leading up to my public career, and Sir Percy's ardent pursuit of me. I implore him, for my sake, to avoid giving the Baronet any occasion of offence, since he is capable of working us so much harm.

Julian only laughs at my fears, yet, when he leaves the hotel an hour later, I feel strangely oppressed. A presentiment of evil overshadowing the man I love in the immediate future haunts me, and refuses to be shaken off. And, as he quits the hotel, Julian Tressider comes face to face with Sir Percy Delahaye.

#### CHAPTER VI.

We, the members of the opera company, are on our way to Mr. Strongford's plantation, a merry party contained in four large carriages, provided by our generous host. The planter has invited us to spend the day at his residence, doubtless at the instigation of his manager, Julian Tressider, or to call him by his assumed name, Frank Rudledge.

Sir Percy Delahaye is seated in the same carriage with me, and as I glance from time to time at his dark, sinister, handsome face, I wonder if he is meditating any evil towards Julian Tressider.

My fears are intensified by the fact that he will make no illusion to Tressider or admit that he has recognised him. I have even tried to lead up to the subject, and failed. What deep game is this man playing?

The plantation is reached after a long and picturesque drive.

Mr. Strongford, a big, handsome, elderly man, accords us a genial welcome, while his daughter Kate plays the part of hostess well and gracefully.

She is a very lovely girl, with a dash of Spanish blood in her veins. Her hair is not unlike my own, of a glossy, purplish-black, fastened with an elegantly-carved comb; but her large, dark eyes, with their heavy, sweeping fringe, are intensely black, sombre as midnight, languorous, yet with veiled fire lurking in their depths.

Her complexion is rich, but transparently clear; her features regular, her face a faultless oval.

I must, indeed, be dear to Julian Tressider, since such wonderful charms have failed to win him from his allegiance to me.

A sumptuous luncheon is served in the large, cool, dining-room.

Amidst the murmur of talk and laughter going on all around I am keenly observant of several things.

Sir Percy Delahaye accepts my lover as a new acquaintance. He seems bent upon ignoring the past.

The two men converse together as if they had never met under any different circumstances.

What am I to infer from this?

Then again: Kate Strongford, while attending to the requirements of her numerous guests, suffering none of them to feel neglected, throws frequent and searching

glances in my direction, and that of Julian Tressider.

He, foolish fellow! has seated himself next to me.

He cannot, strive as he will, divest his looks and words of all tenderness.

Sir Percy faces us on the other side, and thus my position is rendered sufficiently delicate and dangerous.

Two pairs of eyes—Sir Percy's and Kate Strongford's—regard me intently.

Once, in looking up, I intercept a glance from the latter, so expressive of hatred and suspicion, that it fairly startles me.

Yet, even as I detect it, the sweeping fringes are lowered, and Miss Strongford addresses a remark to me in her low, rich, musical voice—a gracious remark, yet it fails to remove the impression caused by that look.

Can it be that the planter's daughter cares for Julian Tressider—that she suspects his tendresse for me, and is jealous in consequence? If so, Heaven help us! We had enough to fight against before, without any fresh complication!

Later on, when the plantation has been visited and duly admired, we have some singing, in which Kate Strongford takes part. As her rich contralto voice ceased to echo through the room she glanced in my direction.

Julian Tressider was lounging beside me, talking in an undertone. This time there is no mistaking the passionate jealousy in her large, dark eyes. It adds considerably to my alarm and discomfort.

It is such a relief, at length, to find myself alone in the garden with Julian Tressider, the others having roamed away in different directions. We can hear their voices, but they are not likely to disturb us in this secluded nook.

In front of us stretches a fragrant aisle of orange trees; on some of them the blossom and ripe fruit are hanging together; the subtle perfume steals pleasantly upon our senses; a mocking-bird is pouring forth a flood of notes, rioting in melody, now a soft strain, now a flood of high, clear notes.

I yield myself up to the bliss of the moment as I lean against an old sundial overgrown with jasmine.

"Julian," I whisper, as my lover's arm encircles my waist, "Kate Strongford does not reflect your indifference. She is jealous of me already. Unless I am greatly mistaken, she loves you!"

An embarrassed, annoyed expression crosses his handsome face.

"I cannot altogether deny the truth of your assertion, Stella," he says, reluctantly, "although such an admission, coming from a man, makes him look like a coxcomb. I need hardly assure you that I have done nothing calculated to arouse any warmer feeling than friendship for myself in Kate Strongford's breast. Indeed, ever since I became conscious of it, I have endeavoured, in so far as I could, to intimate to her the hopeless nature of such an attachment."

"Oh, I am not in the least jealous," I reply, looking far away towards the palmetto trees tossing their beautiful feathery plumes against the turquoise-blue sky. "I trust you implicitly, Julian. I am sorry for Miss Strongford. Unrequited love must be the heaviest cross a woman is ever called upon to bear. Yet I am certain that she suspects our mutual attachment, and dislikes me in consequence. We must be very cautious. That passionate nature of hers, once aroused, would stop at nothing. Then there is Sir Percy to be considered. Julian, did you notice how keenly he watched us at luncheon? I dread that man intensely! What motive can he have in ignoring the past, and treating you as a perfect stranger?"

It is not done out of any kindly consideration entertained for you."

"I mean to have an interview with him to-morrow," he says, decisively. "I don't like this fighting in the dark. I must ascertain, if possible, Delahaye's exact attitude towards me—if I stand in any peril through him. Why he should regard me with enmity I can't imagine, save as a successful rival; and that fact has not been permitted to transpire."

"Neither must it," I rejoin, earnestly. "Promise me, Julian, that you will exercise caution and forbearance. Remember your perilous position, and the probable consequences of offending Sir Percy."

"Am I likely to forget either?" he asks, bitterly. "Stella, darling, I must have been mad the other day when I revealed my long-cherished love for you! I dare not bind you to anything approaching an engagement, since I can never make you my wife."

"Why not?" I ask, nestling a little closer to him.

"What a question!" he exclaims. "Think of your position—and mine! I should be a dastard to take such an advantage of your love for me! Unless I can establish my innocence and face the world a free man again, with an untarnished reputation, I shall never marry. And this is so unlikely to occur. As long as I live the shadow of unmerited disgrace will probably darken my life, and render me a fugitive from justice. Think of the fate awaiting you should you become my wife. At any moment I might be recognised, re-arrested, and taken back to England a prisoner."

"You cannot frighten me away from you," I reply, taking his dear hand in mine, and kissing it. "I would rather be your wife, ay, even under those circumstances, than any other man's. Considered apart from you, Julian, what little wealth and fame I may have gained are valueless to me. On my return to England I shall employ the best detective talent, and never rest until I have fathomed the mystery surrounding the crime wrongly imputed to you, till I have traced the real culprit. Tell me once more all the details connected with your arrest!"

He complies, and I listen to his narrative, carefully noting each point which I may find useful and important later on, when my investigations are set on foot.

The son of a poor country clergyman, long since dead, Julian Tressider had come to town to push his fortunes, having secured, through interest, a good situation in a large mercantile house in the city. By degrees, in common with so many other young men, he drifted into a fast set, which comprised Percy Delahaye, although the two men never became very intimate. He lived beyond his means, without, however, being guilty of any other form of dishonesty. Then, one day, without warning of any kind, the blow fell. Two detectives waited upon him. He was wanted on a charge of manufacturing forged bank-notes. His room was searched, and, to his horror and bewilderment, a bundle of flash notes, chemicals, engravers' tools and other damning evidence were found concealed in a cupboard.

As an amateur engraver, Julian Tressider was known to be skilful, a fact which went terribly against him at the trial. He could not account for the presence of the notes. He could only declare solemnly they had been placed there without his knowledge, an assertion which no one credited. The result was the heavy sentence of fourteen years' penal servitude, and the daring escape from Dartmoor already chronicled.

"When I tell you," he says sadly, in



conclusion, "that I have not the faintest idea to the identity of the man who wrought this fiendish havoc in my life, or his motive in so doing, you will understand the hopeless nature of the task you have undertaken."

"Difficult, perhaps, but not hopeless," I reply firmly. "Heaven will help me, since my cause is a just one. I shall make it the one aim of my life, Julian, to establish your innocence. Meanwhile, although far apart, we shall have the knowledge of our love to console us, dear. You will write to me by every mail? How was it you omitted to inform me of your safe arrival in America, according to promise?"

"I wrote several times," he says, "a few cautious lines, containing an address, but no signature. It is strange they failed to reach you. I had so hoped for a reply, and I was bitterly disappointed when it failed to arrive."

"I never received your letters," I inform him. "I shall write, asking the Vicar about them on my return to England. Oh, Julian, what a blank my life would have been had we not met again!"

He takes me in his arms and kisses me passionately by way of reply, then slips an old-fashioned, but valuable, amethyst ring on my finger.

"It belonged to my mother," he says. "It is the pledge of our betrothal, Stella; the token that you belong to me, and me alone. Darling, selfish as it may be, I cannot give you up now! For joy or sorrow our hearts must remain ever united."

We are so absorbed in each other that we fail to hear a faint rustling among the rose-trees and glossy camellia bushes just behind us. We are blissfully ignorant of the close proximity of Sir Percy Delahaye, in the character of an eavesdropper. His face wears its most malignant expression as he steals softly away, his white, sinewy hand clenched till the nails bite into the flesh.

"For the second time he has crossed my path in life," he muses. "Is it fate or chance that renders our interests so inimical? I care little which. He shall not escape me this time—I swear it. I am determined to remove him effectually. Curse you, Julian Tressider; you have played your last card, and—ab, Miss Strongford, I beg your pardon!"

The exclamation crosses his lips as he suddenly encounters the planter's daughter. Percy Delahaye is swift in arriving at conclusions.

Kate Strongford's white, rigid, beautiful face, her despairing attitude, convince him that she also has witnessed the love scene just enacted. He recognises in this jealous, passion-tortured woman a fitting instrument with which to effect the evil purpose he has in view.

"You are ill," he says, considerably. "Allow me to assist you into the house."

He offers her his arm, and, with some incoherent reply, she accepts it. They walk slowly onwards.

"I, too, have just received a bitter shock," continues Sir Percy. "Assuming that you also witnessed that declaration of love between Mdlle. D'Artois and your father's manager, Frank Rutledge, you will understand the cause of my suffering."

"I heard little or nothing," she replies, briefly; "but I saw her in his arms. I suppose, with a bitter, joyless laugh, 'that you also are in love with her?'"

"Yes. I love her," he admits, "so well that I am determined she shall never marry Frank Rutledge!"

Kate Strongford glances anxiously at his set, resolute face. She recognises in the Baronet a kindred spirit. Why should they not enter into a compact to prevent this dreaded union?

"How can you hinder it?" she demands, eagerly.

Sir Percy comes to a standstill.

"Miss Strongford," he rejoins, "before I answer that question there must be perfect confidence between us. May I infer that you are equally desirous of preventing this match, of placing an effectual barrier between Mdlle. D'Artois and Frank Rutledge?"

"Yes," she cries, with fierce candour, a burning light in her dark eyes, "for I love him. I would do anything—dare anything—in order to keep them apart!"

"I can place this power in your hands," he resumes, tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, and writing a few lines in pencil on it. "This note, given to the nearest inspector of police, will for ever separate the two people we have a mutual interest in keeping apart."

Kate Strongford peruses the note with a perplexed expression. It ran as follows:—

"Julian Tressider, of Dartmoor renown, is here in hiding. Frank Rutledge, Mr Strongford's manager, can supply you with all information respecting him. Refer to personal description issued at time, and oblige, yours truly, JUSTICE."

"What is the meaning of it?" she asks. "Who is Julian Tressider?"

"An old sweetheart of Mdlle. D'Artois," explains Sir Percy. "He got into a terrible scrape some years ago, and fled to South America. I met and recognised him the other day. His arrest will put a stop to all further love-making between Rutledge and Mdlle. D'Artois."

"Yet you tell them to appeal to him for information?"

"Yes. He will be compelled to admit then what he knows about Tressider, and it is of a nature, when made public, to separate him for ever from the woman he loves. You can avail yourself of the note or not, as you deem best."

Only one thing is obvious to Kate Strongford's passion-blinded mind. If Julian Tressider can be unearthed, the bond of love between Beatrice D'Artois and Frank Rutledge will, for some reason, be severed. Perhaps Tressider may prove to be more than her lover. What if he is actually the singer's husband?

That arch-fiend, Delahaye, has effected his purpose. She resolves to act in accordance with his directions. No idea that any harm will accrue to the man she loves, that Julian Tressider and Frank Rutledge are identical, crosses her mind. Percy Delahaye has deceived her on this point, well aware that she would refuse to betray Frank Rutledge of deliberate intent.

"The note shall be delivered," she says, firmly.

"When?"

"To-morrow. I needly hardly thank you for having written it, though. You have a purpose of your own to serve in so doing."

He shrugs his shoulders.

"It might give rise to a prejudice against me in Mdlle. D'Artois' mind were I to be directly instrumental in bringing Julian Tressider to light again," he says, calmly; "and that I wish to avoid. I have endeavoured to serve you as well as myself in this matter, Miss Strongford."

I am intensely happy during the pleasant drive home. The calm, silvery radiance of the evening star seems to shine deep into my heart, and no voice warns me of the evil in store for the one I love best on the morrow.

## CHAPTER VII.

It wants only an hour to the time of performance on the following night. I am about to quit the hotel for the theatre. Someone opens the door and enters my room unceremoniously. I turn round in all astonishment to behold—Kate Strongford.

"Miss Strongford, what brings you here? What is the matter?" I say, fearful lest any harm should have befallen Frank Rutledge.

"Send your maid away," she says, imperiously. "I wish to speak to you alone."

"Do you know where Frank Rutledge is at this moment?" she inquires.

"No, not unless he is at Fairview," I reply, naming the plantation. "I have not seen him since yesterday. Tell me, I implore you, has anything happened to him?"

Kate Strongford's dark eyes regard me with a glance of such intense, withering hatred that I quail beneath it.

"For what has happened you are responsible," she cries, "you alone! I saw you in his arms yesterday, and the sight maddened me, loving him as I do. But for your arrival Frank Rutledge would have bestowed on me the affection I craved, and which you have stolen. In the height of my passion I encountered Sir Percy Delahaye, who had also been a witness of your love-scene. He played me false. He told me I could easily separate you and Frank Rutledge by giving up to justice a certain Julian Tressider, who had once been your lover. He gave me a note to deliver to the head of police in this town. An hour ago I presented it, to learn from him what, it appears, he had long suspected—that Julian Tressider and Frank Rutledge are identical!"

"Sir Percy Delahaye has used me as his tool, but he did not foresee the result. I am not to be tricked with impunity. I will save Frank yet, although the police are out searching for him in every direction. It shall not be said that I betrayed him to a shameful fate. If you know where he is to be found, tell me, that I may warn him of his danger."

"I do not know," I moan. "Oh, Heaven, forgive you and Sir Percy for the part you have played!"

"Frank left home soon after dinner," she continues, rapidly; "and no one has seen him since!"

A sudden light breaks in upon me.

"Perhaps," I cry eagerly, "he has gone to the swamps. He promised to get some flowers for me which can only be obtained there."

"In that case," said Kate Strongford, "we must meet him on his way back, and bid him return to the swamps, and stay there till the search grows less keen. I know the waterways well; but, unfortunately, I cannot manage the boat myself, or I should not solicit your aid. I sprained my wrist badly yesterday. I can scarcely hold an oar. If he is to be saved, you must accompany me!"

"But in less than an hour I am expected to appear at the theatre!" I exclaim despairingly, torn in two between a sense of duty and the desire to save my lover.

"And he loves you?" she retorts, in a tone of intense scorn. "You, who value your professional reputation above his liberty! It is for you that he has passed me by—I, who would die for him! I will go alone, since I dare not trust any of the negroes!"

This is more than I can endure.

"Stop! I will accompany you," I cry, hurriedly, changing my bonnet and mantle

for a long, dark, loose-fitting cloak, and a little velvet cap.

Writing a note to the manager, I inform him that I am unable to appear to night; that the under-study must take my place at short notice.

This note despatched, I put a flask of wine and some biscuits in my pocket.

"Now!" I say, proudly, turning to my undesirable companion, "I am ready. You will not find me lacking in courage or devotion, Miss Strongford!"

"We must be very cautious," she rejoins. "Our movements may be watched. I could not altogether conceal the emotion his disclosure gave rise to from the head of police. He may suspect me of wishing to shield Frank Rutledge. Tie a thick veil over your face. For Heaven's sake walk quickly! Each moment we lose increases his peril!"

She hurries me along till we reach a carriage plying for hire.

We get in, and are driven quickly away from the town towards the river.

I feel giddy and confused, but the cool evening air revives me a little.

I summon all my courage and self-control to my aid. At least, Kate Strongford shall have no cause to despise me—her hated rival.

We alight at some little distance from Mr. Strongford's plantation, and dismiss the carriage.

Kate Strongford leads the way by a short cut to the solitary boat-house, of which she has the key.

"Thank Heaven! He has not returned yet!" she exclaims fervently. "The canoe he always uses for these excursions is absent. We can manage to get this," indicating a light canoe, "down to the water's edge between us."

In silence we carry the canoe down to the river. Kate Strongford has placed some pine torches in the bottom of it.

I take my seat opposite to her, and we glide swiftly down the river towards the swamp, without being observed by anyone belonging to the plantation.

It is still light enough to see the wide, tranquil reaches, covered with tropical forests, the broad beds of lilies floating in the water.

An alligator rears its ugly head not far from our canoe, yet I utter no scream. I feel no alarm, strange as these experiences are to me. Every faculty is concentrated on our fateful errand.

A stranger position than mine can hardly be conceived.

Kate Strongford, hating me with all the strength of her passionate Southern temperament, making no effort to conceal this hatred, has yet stooped to avail herself of my aid, rather than permit the consequences of her vengeful, jealous act to overtake the man we both love so well.

For his sake we, the two women most interested in him, have declared a truce, in order to save him from a fate infinitely worse than death!

My heart is very bitter against Kate Strongford as we row steadily on, my strong wrists doing most of the work. But for her Julian Tressider would have stood in no danger of being re-arrested. Beyond the necessary instructions I need in propelling the canoe, we exchange no remarks; at least, we are open enemies, with no semblance of friendship. Yet our love for Julian Tressider, our desire to serve him, is even stronger than the dislike we entertain for each other.

The swamp is really a vast wood, standing in a lake. Our torch throws a brilliant orange-hued glow over the vines and flowers, lighting up the dark water vistas of the dim, sweet swamps. Sitting in the bow Kate Strongford acts as pilot. The fire

in her splendid dark eyes is no longer veiled; it flashes forth freely. There is something diabolical about her rich-toned beauty. She might be the presiding genius of this weird awful place.

"Let us shout," says Kate Strongford, breaking the oppressive silence. "He will hear us if he is not far off!"

We shout accordingly until we are hoarse, and the swamps resound with dreadful echoes; but no deep, familiar voice responds.

Looking down I see that the lake is pellucid, absolutely devoid of mud, red-brown as amber in here, like so much clear fine wine. The tree-trunks rise clearly from the transparent tide. Their huge roots can be seen coiling on the bottom. Grey-white cypresses rise erect and branchless, like the columns of a Gothic cathedral. The mist of moss is decked with fragrant, vividly-tinted flowers. There is no under-bush, only the great trunks and the water.

Oh, thrice blessed sound! In response to another shout we have raised, I hear Julian Tressider's voice. His canoe is coming towards us down one of the broad, watery aisles. I utter a silent prayer of thanksgiving. I am no longer alone with this malignant woman. My lover is close at hand to protect me.

"Miss Strongford, Stella!" he exclaims, addressing me familiarly in his astonishment. "Good Heavens, what has induced you to visit the swamps by night? You might have lost your way in some of the winding channels."

I remained silent. The embarrassing nature of the situation, now that we have met, keeps me silent. It is Kate Strongford who takes the initiative, and in hard, strained tones, informs him of the danger he is in of being re-arrested, and her share in leading up to this unanticipated misery.

She makes no attempt to shield herself from blame, yet neither does she spare Sir Percy. She seems oblivious of shame, pride, remorse, of Tressider's probable guilt or innocence, of all save a frantic desire to shield him from the consequences of her own mad act.

He utters no word of reproach as she ceases speaking, but his face grows very pale. There is a dangerous gleam in his grey eyes.

"You cannot forgive me?" she moans.

"I can forgive you, Kate," he replies, "vindictively as you have acted. Your blow, aimed at Mdlle. De Artois, has recoiled upon me. I would rather that you had attempted to injure me than her—yet I forgive you. Towards Sir Percy Delahaye I shall exercise less forbearance, however. The hound, the double-dyed traitor, to use you as his instrument in betraying me! The day of reckoning between us cannot, shall not, be long delayed!"

"Dismiss all thoughts of vengeance for the present," I cry, as the canoes float side by side. "Only consult your own safety, Julian."

"How is it that you are together? he asks, briefly.

"I went to her hotel to ascertain where you had gone," explains Kate Strongford, in the same hard tone, "and to request her aid in managing the canoe, since I had sprained my wrist. I would gladly have dispensed with all assistance had it been possible."

"I remembered the flowers you promised to get for me," I interpose, "and we came to the swamps, hoping to find you here."

"Yes I had to go a long way in to procure them," he replies, pointing to a mass of blossom in the bow of the canoe, "or I should have been home long ago. So, once more I am a hunted fugitive from justice!

The sooner this miserable existence is terminated the better."

"Julian, for my sake, do not become reckless—desperate," I whisper earnestly. "Think what we have dared, to warn you of your danger."

"My brave darling!" he exclaims, passionately, ignoring Kate Strongford's presence. "It is on your account I regret my wretched position. It maddens me to reflect upon the risk you run in coming here. How will you account for your absence from the theatre to night, I—"

A faint distant shout reaches us at this moment, thrilling each strained nerve with fresh fear.

Kate Strongford starts violently; then turns towards us, her face white and resolute.

"We are pursued!" she says. "I hardly thought they would venture into the swamps by night! You had better defer your love-making to a more convenient season. Our only hope lies in being able to reach Uncle Caesar's Cabin. I defy them all to find us there. I know the way to it. You," addressing Julian Tressider, "have only to follow. I will save you yet!"

"The shouts are growing nearer. I listen to them in silent agony. Swiftly, noiselessly, the two canoes glide through the clear water. Presently we leave the broad channel for a narrow side one, the windings of which are so intricate I cannot remember them; yet Kate Strongford is a skilful pilot.

She bids me stop at length. We force our way beneath the overhanging boughs and foliage of great trees, at her direction, to see in front of us a small wooden shanty.

Uncle Caesar's Cabin, so called from a runaway negro who found refuge here previous to the emancipation, is built upon great roots of trees, to which the planks of the floor have been nailed down. The water flows beneath it. The surrounding foliage is so dense that not a glimpse of the cabin can be observed from the channel.

Julian Tressider has scarcely drawn our canoes up to the floor of the cabin, and extinguished the torches, when we hear the splash of oars, and the pursuing boat approaches our hiding-place!

#### CHAPTER VIII.

"We have little to fear," Julian Tressider whispers to me reassuringly. "The exact locality of the cabin is known only to a few persons."

Yet I hold my breath as I stand there beside him in the darkness, and pray fervently that we may escape detection.

The voices of our pursuers come still nearer. Among them I can detect that of Sir Percy Delahaye.

Tressider recognises it also, and each fierce passion within his breast is aroused.

The Baronet has been to my hotel, it transpires later on, and ascertained in whose company I had quitted it.

He had drawn his own inferences from Kate Strongford's visit to me.

Her bold move in denouncing him, and appealing to me to aid her in defeating his villainy, has, he knows, rendered his suit hopeless.

Since I cannot possibly entertain a worse opinion of him, he has gratified his rage and malice by openly joining the pursuing party, and helping to hunt Julian Tressider down.

Standing in the doorway of the cabin, Tressider parts the thick foliage in front of it till he can look through, and discern the party in the boat by the light of the torches they carry, while remaining invisible himself.

The boat contains four police officers and our evil genius, Sir Percy Delahaye. They



are holding a consultation as to the best channel to take.

"I knew we were only wasting time coming up this side-channel," one observes. "It don't load anywhere, that I can see. Our bird is off in some other direction."

"Yet I could swear I saw the gleam of a torch far ahead of us as we came along," replies Sir Percy, in clear, distinct tones. "I don't purpose leaving these swamps until he is taken. I will give fifty guineas for the capture of Julian Tressider, alias Frank Rutledge! Now do your best to earn the promised reward. Take him, dead or alive!"

His concentrated hatred leaps forth in this venomous speech.

A gleam from the torches in the boat penetrates the foliage, and shines into Uncle Caesar's Cabin.

I see Julian Tressider standing on the threshold, his handsome face set and rigid; I see Kate Strongford step forward, and place her hand upon his arm, looking in the red glare of the torchlight like some beautiful evil angel.

"That is the man who induced me to betray you!" she whispers. "Sooner or later his life shall pay the penalty!"

"He dies now!" is the reply, as, beside himself at such relentless persecution and treachery on the part of a man he had never wronged, Julian Tressider draws a pistol from his breast, takes aim, and levels it at the unconscious Baronet's head, reckless of the consequence of this rash act, thirsting only for vengeance. Another second, and—

Heaven lends me strength and promptitude. I spring forward. I wrest the revolver from his grasp without discharging it—the report would betray our hiding-place.

Breathless, exhausted, I hear the stroke of the oars, as the boat containing our pursuers glides away. I see by the vanishing light Kate Strongford's terrified face. She, too, realises the narrowness of our escape from detection.

"Oh, Julian! were you mad to attempt his life, and under such circumstances?" I murmur, "to risk all for revenge. For the second time I have saved you, and from a worse peril than the previous one. Thank Heaven that you are not a murderer!"

"My darling, forgive me!" he says, contritely, alive, now that the frenzy of passion is spent, to the results of the contemplated evil. "My good angel, you have indeed preserved me from crime, from placing myself and others in a terrible position! Yes, I was mad, Stella; but surely that villain's conduct is calculated to make me so? Do not be afraid; my temper shall not get the upper hand of me again."

He throws his arms around me in the darkness. But for this support I should sink to the ground—my strength has deserted me at last.

I kiss him in token of forgiveness, and lean my weary, aching head upon his breast.

Kate Strongford neither moves nor speaks.

"I think I may venture to light one of the torches now," Julian observes, presently, breaking the silence.

"Yes. We must return as soon as possible, and leave you here," she replies. "You could not have a better hiding-place!"

"But how can you exist here, even for a few days?" I ask, despairingly, viewing the cabin, which is quite destitute of even the rudest furniture. "And by what means will you obtain food?"

"I shall attend to that," says Kate Strongford, quietly. "Mr. Tressider's

wants will be supplied while he remains here. You need be under no apprehension on that score, Mdlle. D'Artois."

For a moment I feel jealous of her privilege in being able to minister to his requirements. Then I dismiss the feeling as unworthy. If he can but succeed in evading his pursuers, thanks to her connivance, I ought to be more than satisfied.

"Oh, I shall be all right here," Julian replies, with assumed lightness; "and Kate will not let me starve. Now I will launch your canoe, or your prolonged absence will give rise to suspicion. Stella, my love, my darling, for the present we must part. Hope on, trust on; do not let your faith in my innocence die out. As soon as I can succeed in reaching another part of the world, where I shall be comparatively safe from detection, you shall receive tidings of me."

He kisses me passionately again and again then places me in the canoe, and turns to Kate Strongford.

"I enjoin you to see that Mdlle. D'Artois reaches the hotel in safety," he says, sternly. "In partial atonement for the harm you have wrought me, however unintentionally; take care of her, and see that no danger threatens her on the way home. I shall hold you responsible for her safe return."

A scornful smile flits across Kate Strongford's dark, clear-cut face at his words. They wound her like daggers, betraying, as they do, his love for me.

"She will come to no harm while with me," she replies, with proud emphasis. "Are you afraid to trust us together?"

I know the fear at his heart, but I will not permit him to think I share it. We bid each other good-bye, and the canoe glides away from that dreary spot. Julian Tressider is left behind. I am once more alone with Kate Strongford.

Again the oppressive perfume of the flowers, the close, still atmosphere renders me faint and giddy. My vision becomes blurred. Light dances before my eyes. There are three Kate Strongfords sitting in the bow instead of one. As we pass through the narrow lane of flowering plants the miasma of scent overpowers me completely, and I faint.

When I recover consciousness we have reached the edge of the swamps. The dense forest is left behind. Once more the clear, starlit sky is over our heads, the fresh air plays around us. With a sense of unspeakable relief I sit up and face my companion. Presently we land and replace the canoe in the boat-house.

"If you would only permit me to thank you for what you have done in order to save him—for what you propose doing!" I exclaim, impulsively, in a vain desire to establish more friendly relations between us.

"I require no thanks, least of all from you!" Kate Strongford replies, with a superb disdain which I cannot help admiring. "What I did was done for his sake alone. You might tell me, though, what you meant by that remark; that, for the second time, you have saved him!"

I comply with her request. I tell her all. She knows that Julian Tressider cared for me ere he had met her, that I have not robbed her, as she previously imagined, of his love.

She makes no comment on my narrative, however it may have affected her. In silence we walk towards the planter's residence. He meets us at the door, a troubled, anxious expression on his genial face. To my relief and surprise he asks no questions respecting our night voyage. He shrewdly suspects its motive, and, desirous as he is that his erstwhile favourite and manager should avoid arrest, Mr. Strongford is more likely

to praise than blame us for conniving at his escape.

Refreshments are hospitably pressed upon me by the planter. I cannot eat, but I drink a glass of wine. I have tasted nothing since starting; the biscuits and sherry-bask I left with Julian Tressider in the hut.

One of the planter's carriages is put in requisition to convey me back to the hotel. I reach it between three and four in the morning. The manager of our company, who has been quite at a loss to account for my absence, comes forward to meet me, accompanied by his wife. He is inclined to be angry, to resent my non-appearance at the theatre over-night.

"My dear child, how you have alarmed me!" cries Mrs. Rupert, hastening towards me. "Where have you been?"

I strive to answer, but the room whirls madly round. There is a sound of rushing waters in my ears, and without a moan I fall unconscious at her feet.

England again, dear old England, beloved by all loyal English hearts above other countries, dispire its grey skies, blank winds, and frequent fogs. Indeed, I actually prefer them to the blue heavens and cloudless sunshine associated in my mind with so much suffering.

I have made my home once more with the Paolis, although my five years' apprenticeship, as it were, to the Professor are at an end, and I am free to form my own professional engagements, to receive the whole of the large salaries, which, as a successful and popular *cantatrice*, I can command.

Having few friends and no relations of my own, I have gladly elected to stay on with the kindly genial little Italian and his wife, to whom, in a great measure, I owe my good fortune. Were I their own child they could hardly treat me with more affection and regard. Their quiet but luxurious *menage* suits me far better than an establishment of my own.

A severe illness, which quite incapacitated me from appearing in public, and drove the manager nearly frantic, was the result of that eventful excursion to the swamps.

Upon my recovery a note was given to me, written and forwarded by Julian Tressider, containing the welcome information, that, aided by Kate Strongford and her father, he had contrived to elude his pursuers, and to get away to Africa, where a friend of Mr. Strongford's, who owned a large ostrich farm, had provided him with employment. Soon after this I returned with the others to England.

Julian Tressider and I have never met since that terrible night passed in the swamps. We correspond regularly, our love for each other is deep and true as ever, yet our hope of one day becoming man and wife seems destined never to be realised.

The attempt to investigate and trace the crime attributed to Julian Tressider home to the actual offender, which I have renewed from time to time, has proved a complete failure.

The detectives I have employed were sceptical as to Tressider's innocence, and of the opinion that there was really no case to be gone into. The inquiries they set on foot led to no discovery or arrest. I have simply spent a great deal of money to no purpose.

Julian Tressider is as far off as ever from receiving legal absolution for the sin he did not commit, and that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick darkens both our lives, widely parted as we are by distance and adverse fate.

I have reached my two-and-twentieth birthday. More than one good offer of marriage has fallen to my share, more than

one title been placed at my feet, yet I am still Stella Brookfield, and, failing Julian Tressider's re-appearance, I shall never marry.

It is a foggy day in March. As I sit alone in the pretty, cosy, drawing-room with my favourite Scamp, no longer a wild puppy, but a staid, middle-aged dog, at my side, my thoughts revert to the man I love. A more intense yearning than usual to see his face, to hear his voice, to be folded again in close embrace to that loyal heart, takes possession of me till it grows unbearable. Rising I go to the window and look out.

There is little to be seen, however. Now and then a phantom cab, driven by a spectral driver, goes slowly by, or a link held by an invisible hand flashes out of the fog, to vanish into it again. All is dim, shadowy, unreal. I turn away with a shudder. I shall be glad when the Signora, who is out making calls, returns. My thoughts are but mournful companions.

By some process of transition these thoughts shift suddenly from Julian Tressider to Sir Percy Delahaye. Since my return to town I have encountered the Baronet frequently in society, but he has never ventured to renew his suit or to call on the Paolis, whom I have acquainted of his treacherous conduct. My attitude when we meet is sufficient to assure him that entreaty or apology would be worse than useless, that my heart is hopelessly steeled against him. Rumour says that Sir Percy is leading a very fast life, and going generally to the dogs. It seems to me those noble animals are insulted by the comparison.

"A gentleman requesting a subscription to a charity for civilising the African niggers, please, miss," says the footman, breaking in upon the reverie I am indulging in. "He wishes particular to see you."

"Tell him to come in," I say, rather wearily. It is one of the penalties of fame that I am pestered with appeals of every possible description. The gentleman enters accordingly. He is very tall, with long grey hair and a flowing grey beard.

"The commendable object we have in view," he commences, "cannot fail to arouse your interest. The African, viewed as a man and a brother—"

He pauses suddenly. The door was closed behind Charles the magnificent. My visitor, assured of this, to my astonishment plucks off his wig and beard, removes his spectacles, and straightens his bent shoulders. My lover, Julian Tressider, whom I had deemed to be thousands of miles away in Africa, stands before me!

"Julian," I gasp. "You?"

He held out his arms, and I rush into them, every other consideration lost sight of, swallowed up, in the intense joy of re-union. When I lift my face at length it is wet with tears which I have not shed. They fell from his eyes, and he kisses them away.

"What has brought you home?" I ask, as soon as I can speak. "Why have you run this fearful risk of detection?"

"I could bear the separation from you no longer," he replies hoarsely. "You are the magnet, Stella, that has drawn me back to England!"

#### CHAPTER IX.

So I am responsible for his return. As I realise the danger it involves, the fate in store for him, should he be recognised, and re-arrested, I cling yet closer to my lover. It is for my sake he has run this risk. How can I reproach him? I to whom his return has afforded exquisite happiness?

"What if Sir Percy Delahaye should become aware of your presence here in England?" I ask, fearfully, when other topics have been discussed.

"I fancy I am keen enough to baffle him," is the confident reply. "I am as far off as ever from understanding that beggar's spite against me. I generally select foggy days for my walks abroad as the safest. I watched the Signora out of the house before ringing to inquire if you were at home, darling!"

He tells me where he is lodging, in a quiet West-end suburb, and I promise to call on him there. What the result of his daring act in returning to England will be I dread to think! We have met again, and for the present this is all-sufficient.

"Julian, will this protracted suspense and waiting ever come to an end?" I ask sadly, as he resumes his disguise and prepares to depart.

"Heaven only knows," is the equally sad rejoinder. "For awhile I can lie perdu in town, in order to be near you, Stella. Then, failing any unforeseen occurrence tending to establish my innocence, I must return to Africa. You shall never hear my name while the cruel, undeserved stigma rests upon it. What joy would such a marriage afford us?"

"It is so hard," I cry, "that we should be compelled to suffer thus, to lead parted lives, when you are innocent!"

"Yes, in that fact lies the sting," he answers. "Some fiend incarnate has ruined my life by fastening this crime upon me, and I am powerless to extricate myself from its clutches. Don't cry, darling! Heaven may yet come to our aid, if we continue to trust in its mercy. Give me another kiss. I will enter it as part of your subscription to the fund for civilising the African negro—a nice party he is when you know him. Good-bye, my love, my true-hearted girl!"

As the footman shows Julian Tressider out I walk to the window to obtain a parting glimpse of him. I watch him cross the road and disappear in the fog. Another shadowy form emerges from the gloom, and flits along close behind him. A sudden fear thrills through me. Is my lover being followed, hunted down? What if Sir Percy Delahaye has discovered his return to England, and set the detectives on his track, with a view to his being sent back to penal servitude? The thought is agony. I try to persuade myself that it is merely by chance a man went alone close behind him just now, yet my fears refuse to be allayed.

Julian Tressider walks briskly along till he reaches Oxford-street, unconscious of the fact that his footsteps are being dogged. The fog clears suddenly, as it not unfrequently does in London; the traffic in the road, and the shop-windows become once more visible.

Tressider is about to cross the road when a loud shout arrests his attention. He looks swiftly round. A small, spare, elderly man endeavouring to dodge round in front of an omnibus has been knocked down by the pole. He lies beneath the horses' feet. Quick as lightning, ere the wheels can go over him, Julian Tressider darts forward and snatches him from his perilous position at the risk of his own life.

He carries the half-unconscious man on to the pavement in his strong arms. A crowd gathers quickly round them; the inevitable policeman arrives. The injured man has been badly kicked in the side by one of the bus horses. An ambulance is sent for to convey him to the nearest hospital.

Meanwhile, in the attempt to rescue him, Julian Tressider's wig of long grey hair has fallen off and been trampled under foot. The crowd laughs and stares at the odd contrast between the crisp, wavy brown hair left exposed and the venerable grey

beard he wears. Fearful of exciting so much notice he is about to disappear, when a firm, detaining hand is placed upon his shoulder, and the man who has never lost sight of him says quietly,—

"Julian Tressider, I hold a warrant for your apprehension. You are the man who escaped from Dartmoor five years ago, and it has taken us all this time to find you."

Sick at heart, crushed, wretched, Julian Tressider staggers back. For a moment some wild idea of offering resistance flits through his mind, then he dismisses it as hopeless. The shadow of that living death has descended darkly upon him again.

"I am ready to accompany you," he says, briefly. "You need not handcuff me, I shall make no attempt to escape."

But the injured man, to whom someone has administered brandy, has witnessed the arrest. He turns appealingly to the bystanders, an eager, startled look in his eyes.

"For the love of Heaven," he cries, as the detective and Julian Tressider get into a cab, "tell me his name? Did I hear aright? Was it Tressider?"

They answer in the affirmative. The sufferer merely groans, and closes his eyes.

They carry him away to the hospital; the house-surgeon can do but little for him; that kick in the side will cost him his life. He has but a few hours to live.

"Doctor," he whispers hoarsely, "I'm bound to do one act of justice before I die—to clear an innocent man. Julian Tressider, he as dragged me out from under the very wheels of the bus an hour ago, only to be arrested directly after as an escaped convict, never committed the crime that led to his being sentenced to penal servitude."

"He little thought that he was a-trying to save the very man who had helped to ruin him; but I sh.n't be ungrateful, and I'll clear him yet."

Those forged notes which he was accused of making were placed in his room by me at the instigation of Sir Percy Delahaye, a gent who had a spite against him. He paid me handsome for the job. I manufactured the flash notes, and concealed them in Mr. Tressider's room during his absence.

"Sir Percy wrote an anonymous letter to the police, informing against him. The place was searched, the notes discovered, and Mr. Tressider found guilty."

"As I'm a dying man, I've told you the solemn truth. You'll see him cleared, won't you? I've often felt uncomfortable about this job, the dirtiest I ever undertook in my life."

"When I heard his name mentioned I was struck all of a heap. It seemed like Heaven's justice, bringing us together again. And the money did me no good—none whatever. It all went, and Sir Percy wouldn't advance me another penny. He knew I dared not betray him; but I've spoken at last, and to some purpose."

The doctor recognised the serious nature of the charge directed against a man so well-known in society as Sir Percy Delahaye.

A magistrate was at once requested to attend at the hospital, and John Vennor's depositions were taken.

Three hours later he died, after receiving an assurance that his statement should be forwarded to the proper authorities, with a view to the establishment of Julian Tressider's innocence.

And of all that has transpired I, Stella Brookfield remain ignorant until the following morning.

I have long since confided my strange,

**Next Week's Novelette is entitled HER JUST REWARD.**



unhappy love-story to the Paolis. As the Professor scans the columns of the *Daily Telegraph* at breakfast time, I see him turn pale; then he glances uneasily in my direction.

My fears, which lie so close to the surface now, are aroused.

"You have just read something in that paper which concerns me," I say, starting up from my seat. "Oh, let me know the worst at once!"

"My dear child," he says kindly, "It is both good and bad, this intelligence, but the good predominates. Sit down, and I will read it to you."

The report of Julian Tressider's rearrest is headed, "A Strange Occurrence." It alludes to a deposition of great importance, made by the man whom Tressider endeavoured to rescue; and which, when published, is likely to lead to his release.

The reporter alludes to the dramatic nature of the incident in Oxford-street; but I can listen to no more now.

"Oh, thank Heaven, thank Heaven!" I sob, hysterically. "It has heard my prayers at length. That encounter was the result, not of chance, but Providence. The innocence of the man I love will ere long be established!"

I express my desire, as I grow a little calmer, to go to Julian Tressider at once. If only he might be permitted to hear the glad tidings first from my lips!

But the Professor says they would probably refuse me access to him at present. He bids me remain at home while he goes out in search of fresh information on my behalf.

In my excited condition the hours slip away like moments. The Professor returns, welcome as Noah's dove. He has obtained permission to see the prisoner to-morrow—an interview has been promised.

Meanwhile, strenuous efforts are being set on foot to secure Julian Tressider's speedy release.

John Vennor's deposition has been forwarded to the Home Secretary, and several influential men are warmly advocating the prisoner's cause.

"Does Julian know there is hope for him?" I ask. "Surely they will not keep him in ignorance of it?"

"Yes, he knows," is the reassuring reply, "and to-morrow you shall tell him yourself."

The evening papers, when they appear, contain yet more startling intelligence.

Sir Percy Delahaye has committed suicide. He was found at noon by the servants in his study, shot through the head, the smoking pistol still grasped in his lifeless hand, and the world has one bad man the less to be on its guard against.

After learning that his accomplice had betrayed him, and ascertaining the extent to which he was incriminated by the facts disclosed, Sir Percy must have gone at once to his study and shot himself, rather than face the obloquy, the public prosecution awaiting him, when all should stand revealed.

On his desk lay a letter addressed to Julian Tressider, containing an admission of his guilt, and explaining the motive which had led up to the criminal of an apparently purposeless crime.

"My desire to efface you, in the first instance," ran this letter, "had its origin in our distant relationship, of which I had every reason to keep you in ignorance."

"Seven years ago a conditional fortune was left me by my grand-uncle, a man verging on his hundredth year. I, his only supposed relation, inherited his wealth; but, in the event of his daughter, who had married against his wishes, and of whom he had long lost sight, or her children or

grandchildren, ever coming forward to claim it, the bulk of the money was to revert to them, I only receiving a small legacy.

"I thought myself comparatively safe until I met you in town. Your extraordinary likeness to a portrait of my grand-uncle, taken when he was a young man, first aroused my suspicions. I made some cautious inquiries.

"I ascertained you to be his great grandson on the mother's side. You appeared to have no idea of the relationship, or of the fortune which was legally yours, yet I feared and hated you, by reason of what I had discovered. At any moment the truth might transpire, I might be called upon to yield my wealth up to you. Then a clause inserted in the old man's will inspired me with a fiendish idea.

"You were to inherit, providing you had been guilty of no act rendering you amenable to the law. I knew John Vennor as a manufacturer of flash notes, a betting man, a useful tool with which to accomplish a sinister purpose.

"Moreover, he was in my power, and he feared to offend me. With his connivance the affair was arranged.

"When you were sentenced I felt secure. You could not at any future time claim the money left under the will, since you had violated its conditions by becoming a felon.

"Your subsequent escape from Dartmoor annoyed me greatly. I went down there to make inquiries about it. I heard that a suit of convict's clothes had been dug up in a cottage garden; that a labourer had beheld an old woman coming from that cottage leap a stile in a manner which proved her dress to have been merely a disguise.

The name of the people who had rented the cottage was Brookfield. When I met Miss Brookfield in London, later on, I mentioned these facts in conversation. I inferred, from her startled manner, that it was she who had connived at your escape.

"I fell madly in love with her. I followed her to South America. There I encountered you again. I discovered you to be my rival in her affections, and I vowed to accomplish your re-arrest. In this I should have succeeded but for the two women who loved you best. They outwitted me, and, for the second time, you escaped.

"I had now a double reason in hating you and hunting you down. My spies informed me of your arrival in England. It was I who set the police upon your track. Your encounter with John Vennor, however, and his confession, implicating myself, has effectually turned the tables. I cannot survive the disgrace of such an *exposé*. *Mon ami*, I leave you the best of the game, and the remainder of the money. I admit defeat; also that I have injured you beyond the possibility of pardon. I neither ask forgiveness nor desire it. I have staked all and lost. It only remains to efface myself as I once attempted to efface you. For the first and last time I sign myself.—Your affectionate kinsman,

"PERCY DELAHAYE."

This cynical epistle removes the last doubt from our minds with regard to the Baronet's unrelenting animosity towards Julian Tressider.

Little more remains to be said.

Three weeks later Julian Tressider receives that contradiction in terms—a free pardon from Her Majesty's Government for a crime he has never committed.

The peculiar injustice attached to his case has attracted much notice; and on regaining his liberty he receives quite an ovation.

Much against his will, he becomes the hero of the hour. Friends rally round him

on all sides. Life is once more radiant with hope and love.

The fortune he should have inherited from his great-grandfather has dwindled down, through Sir Percy's extravagance, to thirty-thousand pounds.

This sum of money he invests in the firm which first employed him, becoming a partner, since all his talent lies in the direction of trade.

News reaches us from South America that Kate Strongford has entered a convent.

Both Julian and I feel keenly sorry for the lonely old planter, deprived for ever of the society of his beloved daughter.

We know only too well why she has taken this step; but the subject is a painful one, and we seldom allude to it.

Poor, beautiful Kate! Her love was the most genuine thing about her.

"When are we to be married, darling?" asks Julian one day, as we discuss our future prospects. "I cannot afford to wait much longer for my wife!"

"When you please," is my dutiful reply. "Only my dear old friend the Vicar must come from Dartmoor to perform the ceremony. It was he who unearthed your letters to me. They were lying *perdu* at the village post-office. It had not occurred to the postmistress to return or forward them."

"Of course, the Vicar shall come, since you wish it," says my lover. "He must hold himself in readiness to tie the knot a month hence. Stella, if you had not disguised me so cleverly as an old woman that night, we might have missed all our present happiness!"

"They were poor Aunt Deborah's things," I reply, laughingly. "They had been lying by for years. I little dreamt how useful they would one day prove—long after her death!"

"And your public life?" he asks, in a graver tone. Are you willing to renounce it for my sake? I could not permit my wife to lead such a twofold existence!"

"More than willing!" I murmur, as I nestle closely to him. For, after all, what are fame and wealth? Mere withered leaves, as compared with love—failing which, the life of a true woman can never be perfect; and this love, stronger than death, is mine. I can afford to renounce the rest!

[THE END.]

#### WORTH WHILE.

It is easy enough to be pleasant

When life flows by like a song,  
But the man worth while is the one who will smile

When everything goes dead wrong.  
For the test of the heart is trouble,  
And it always comes with the years,  
And the smile that is worth the praises of earth

Is the smile that shines through tears.

It is easy enough to be prudent,  
When nothing tempts you to stray,  
When without or within no voice of sin  
Is luring your soul away.  
But it's only a negative virtue,  
Until it is tried by fire,  
And the life that is worth the honor of earth  
Is the one that resists desire.

By the cynic, the sad, the fallen,  
Who had no strength for the strife,  
The world's highway is cumbered to-day,  
They make up the item of life.  
But the virtue that conquers passion,  
And the sorrow that hides in a smile,  
It is these that are worth the homage of earth,  
For we find them but once in a while.

It is an invigorating and spirited story by the author of "We Three Girls."

# A GOLDEN DESTINY.

By the author of "Redeemed by Fate." "The Mistress of Lynwood," &c.

## SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

The father of Harold, Viscount St. Croix, is anxious that he should take as his wife Ermentrude Seymour, niece of Sir Travice Leigh. Harold goes down to Woodleigh Court for the purpose of proposing to Ermentrude, and while screwing his courage up to the sticking point accidentally meets Irene Duval, the girl he befriended one night on the Embankment in London. Irene Duval is staying in an adjoining house that has the reputation of being haunted, and there Harold meets her while looking over the place. He finds himself getting more than interested in this young lady, and, at the same time, is mystified by her behaviour and sudden disappearance. Anthony Wyndham, the owner of Wyndham Abbey, and Sir Travice Leigh are neighbours. Marjorie Wyndham has fallen in love with Roy Fraser, a penniless architect, and keeps the news from her father. Suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, information reaches Mr. Wyndham that he is not the rightful owner of the Abbey but one Geoffrey Wyndham. This Geoffrey, while producing the best evidence that he is the person entitled to enjoy the Wyndham estates, is, in reality, an impostor. But so cleverly does he play the part that he succeeds in obtaining the consent of Marjorie to their marriage. Marjorie only agrees, however, on learning from her father that it is the one way in which they can retain the use of Wyndham Abbey.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

**T**HE day on which Sir Travice Leigh, having returned from Blackminster, told Mrs. Seymour that his will was duly signed and witnessed, and that if anything happened to him Ermentrude would become his heiress, was verily a red-letter one in her calendar.

"At last I can breathe freely," she muttered, on regaining her room after hearing the important communication, "and the miserable anxiety of these last few weeks must surely be nearly at an end. Tomorrow I shall hear from Sumner, who will also have good news to tell us. Yes, my fortunate star is at last in the ascendant."

She went to her daughter's boudoir where Ermentrude was standing at the window, disconsolately staring out into the grounds, which lay bathed in a glow of golden sunlight. In her hand she held an open note, but this she hastily crushed into her pocket on observing her mother.

Mrs. Seymour's quick eyes observed the action, but she did not, at the moment, take any notice of it—perhaps because she was so anxious to give the joyful tidings which she had just received.

Ermentrude's delight equalled her own, although she did not give it verbal expression. Her stately form seemed instinct with a new-born pride, and she drew up her lovely neck, as if she already felt on her head the coronet of a countess.

"Yours is indeed a golden destiny!" her mother said, gazing on her beauty with a very natural pride. "If you have sons, the elder will succeed to his father's earldom, and the younger must have Sir Travice's estates. Where will you find another girl equally lucky?"

Across the radiance of the girl's face there came a sudden shadow, and she drew hastily back from the window.

Mrs. Seymour, following her gaze, saw the Italian secretary, Villari, passing the terrace beneath.

Turning round, she fixed her eyes searchingly on Ermentrude's face, which had grown suddenly pale, while an expression, half frightened, half defiant, had come upon it.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in a low voice, coming in front of her daughter, and taking hold of both her hands. "What is there between you and this man, which should make you look so different?"

"Nothing!" replied the girl throwing her head back. "What should there be between us?"

"That is a question easily answered. He is your uncle's secretary, and it is in that character he should stand to you. But I tell you candidly, Ermentrude, I am afraid of you. Your love of admiration is so great that Heaven only knows the mischief it might have led you into if I had not kept such a vigilant watch upon you. You surely cannot have been so foolish as to have even a flirtation with this young man?"

"What nonsense you talk!" was the young lady's filial reply. "I wonder what you will next accuse me of!"

"He is handsome!" added Mrs. Seymour, speaking half to herself; "and he looks as if he would make a very Romeo of a lover; but to permit even his admiration—oh! it would be madness, madness!"

"Of course, it would," retorted Ermentrude, sharply, "don't you think I am sharp enough to see that?"

"I should think so; only girls always are, and I suppose always will be foolish. They think they know better than their mothers, and as a consequence fall into all sorts of mischief."

And with this parting truism she left the room, haunted by a vague fear, which even Ermentrude's denial had not set at rest.

Ermentrude was not so conscientious that she would hesitate at an untruth if it suited her purpose to tell one, and of this weakness her mother was fully aware. Indeed, it had been the task of her life to keep Sir Travice in ignorance of his niece's somewhat lax notions, for he himself was scrupulously particular in such matters, and would not have uttered a lie, though he had known it would bring him all the wealth and honour of the world.

While this conversation was taking place in the boudoir, another of a very different kind was in process downstairs, where Sir Travice and Wise, the detective, were in consultation.

The latter had been sent for by the Baronet, who was growing impatient at his lack of success in discovering Lord St. Croix's assailant.

"It seems to me that you have found out just nothing at all," he said, pacing the library where the interview took place.

"Some weeks have now elapsed, and you have not even obtained a clue."

"I did not say so, Sir Travice."

The Baronet stopped, and faced him in some excitement.

"Do you mean, then, that you have a clue?"

"I believe so!" was the cautious retort.

"Then why did you not tell me of it before?"

"Because I wanted, and want still, to make quite sure before disclosing anything. You see, Sir Travice, in affairs such as this you cannot be too careful, and secrecy is absolutely essential to ultimate success. If I were to tell you what I have discovered, you might tell it in confidence to Lord St. Croix, seeing that he is the person most interested; he in turn might tell it to the young lady he is engaged to, and she to her mother, so that in the end everybody would know it, and in time it would leak out to the servants, and so all my plans would be upset."

The Baronet nodded thoughtfully.

"There is something in what you say, no

doubt, but if you like, I am willing to give you a promise not to repeat your disclosure."

"Thank you, Sir Travice, but if you will allow me to keep it to myself for a few more days, I shall be much obliged, and I don't think in the end you will find your confidence misplaced. I can quite understand that you are growing impatient, and think I am doing very little for my money, but if I don't lay my hand on the person who fired the pistol at Lord St. Croix, why then, I shan't expect you to give me one farthing. I can't say fairer than that—now can I, sir?"

Thus pressed, Sir Travice yielded, and Wise was permitted to keep to himself his alleged discoveries—of which in good truth, the Baronet was inclined to think somewhat lightly, for he was of opinion that if the detective had really obtained a clue he would have endeavoured to justify his apparent non-success by telling it, especially under the seal of confidence.

Mr. Wise had certainly not the air of a business man, for his custom was to loiter idly about, joking and chatting with the servants, with the gardeners, and even Lord St. Croix, or the Italian secretary, or Miss Seymour herself, when occasions for meeting them were given him.

It is true he was up early and late; his favourite time for sauntering about the grounds was from eleven to twelve o'clock at night, and from five to six in the morning; and on the particular evening of which we write he was in the plantation at about eleven o'clock, when he suddenly came into violent collision with a dark body, which, on inspection, proved to be one of the footmen.

"Now then!" cried Wise, explosively. "What the deuce do you mean by tearing along in that insane fashion, I should like to know?"

"You'd tear along too, if you'd seen what I've seen," answered the footman, with a quaver in his voice, and catching hold of the detective's shoulder as if glad of the support. "I shall give warning to-morrow—I've a good mind I'd leave straight off, wages or no wages, for what's the good of a pound or two more or less if you're to be frightened out of your wits in the earning of it?"

"What do you mean?"

"I means what I says—so there, Mr. Wise."

The detective administered a good shake to the somewhat incoherent servant—apparently by way of infusing a degree of common sense into him.

"You've been drinking, John Jones."

"Pon my say so, I haven't," earnestly asseverated the maligned John Jones. "Flesh and blood I don't mind, and I'll knock down the first as says I do; but when it comes to ghosts and ghostesses, it's an entirely different matter, and I don't mind confessing that my knees shook to that extent that I could hardly run away."

"But what have you seen?"

"Haven't I been a-telling of you? Why a ghost, for sure and certain."

"Where?"

"Just out there, beyond the plantation."

"Are you speaking the truth, or are you only frightened by what you've heard the other servants saying?"

"It's the gospel truth, Mr. Wise, and of that I'll take my dying day."

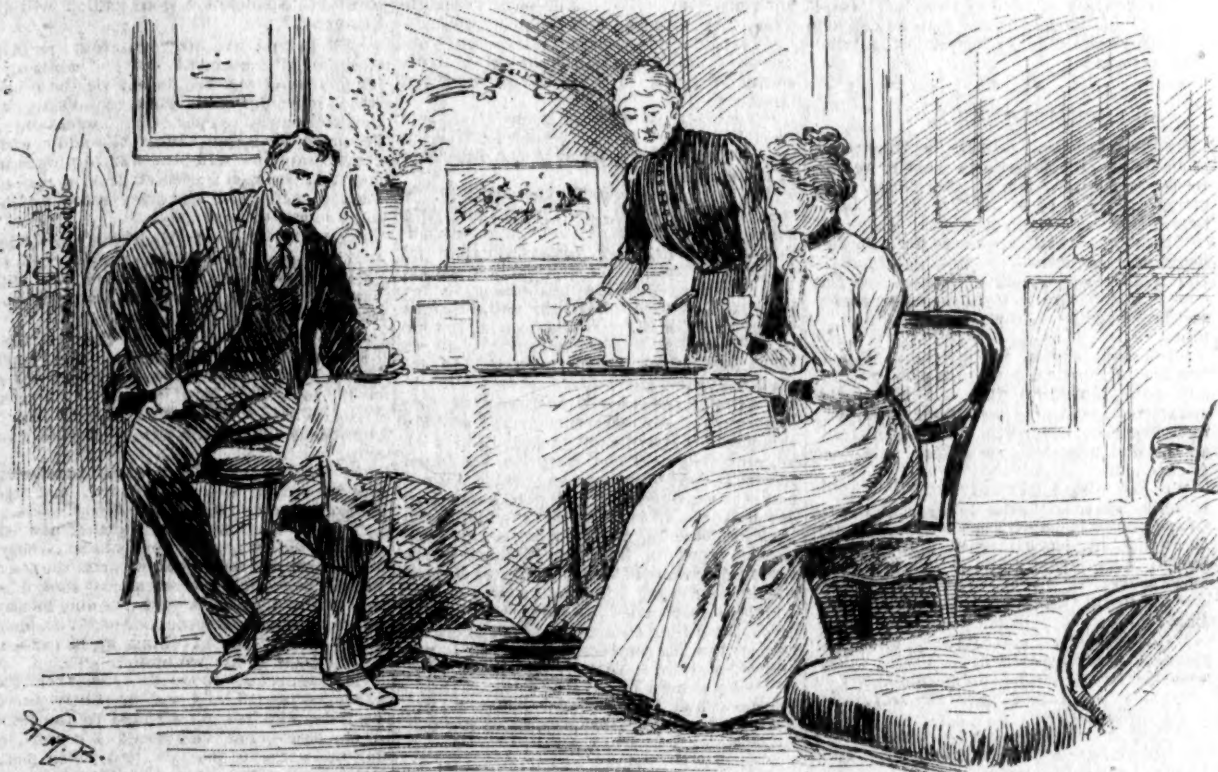
"But what kind of figure was it—a man or a woman?"

"It wasn't neither the one nor the other—it was a ghost."

"But there are male ghosts and female ghosts, I suppose?"

"Are there? I didn't know it, and I





"IT—IT TASTES RATHER BITTER," REPLIED IRENE, WITH SOME HESITATION.

don't want to know nothing at all about them. This was a long, white creature, and it came right out of the ground, before my very eyes."

"And you ran away?"

"So you would have ran away, I guess, or anything else with an ounce of brains in their heads," returned Mr. Jones, with offended dignity. "I knew when I was well off, and it's a good thing for me I escaped when I did. Why, I have heard tell of people being struck silly at seeing such a sight."

"Perhaps there was no necessity for the operation in your case," observed the detective, drily. "You can't tell me, then, where the ghost disappeared to?"

"No, sir, I can't; and if you'll let go of my arm I shall be glad to get back into the house. It's time all respectable people were abed."

Wise replied to this shaft of satire with a good-humoured laugh.

"Not so bad for you, Mr. Jones. Well, get on home, and I'll see if I can unearth this ghost of yours."

As soon as the footman had disappeared he walked with swift, silent footsteps along the plantation, until he came to the very spot on which Lord St. Croix had stood when startled by the apparition—or whatever else it might have been. Arrived here, the detective cast a quick glance round, and then proceeded to ensconce himself in the lilac bushes, which very effectually concealed him from view.

"If anyone has left the house they will probably return to it through this gate, and then it will be a strange thing if I can't find out who the ghost really is," he said to himself, preparing to wait with all the patience he could command.

Luckily for him the night was warm, and there was just sufficient light to enable him to distinguish objects with tolerable accuracy.

Above his head a bat was circling round and round, and occasionally the night silence was broken by the weird, discordant shriek of an owl, or some other nocturnal bird, as it pounced upon its prey.

By-and-by the stable clock struck the half-hour—half past eleven; then once again—this time a quarter to twelve. Just as the strokes were dying away there came the faintest possible rustling of leaves, as if the skirt of a woman's dress, or some other piece of drapery, had caught against a bush, lightly stirring the foliage.

The detective was immediately on the alert, and looked forth from his place of concealment. There, a few paces from the lilac bush, was a tall white figure, vague as to outline, and indeed almost shapeless. It paused for a moment nearly opposite the gate, and then seemed to disappear in the earth.

"By Jove! This is a rum go!" muttered the unseen watcher; but he was an eminently practical man, and perhaps not altogether unused to "rum goes," so he quietly left his concealment, and went straight to the spot on which the figure had stood before vanishing.

As he looked round with his usual instinctive caution, his eye fell on a tiny fragment of something white, caught on the thorn of a bramble, and of this he quickly possessed himself.

It proved, on examination, to be an atom of lace—very fine and expensive lace, as Mr. Wise was skilled enough to know, and he put it carefully away in his pocket-book with a satisfied smile on his lips.

"Either Mrs. Seymour or Miss Seymour," he said to himself; "its one of the two."

And then he went down on his hands and knees, and he examined the ground by the light of a dark lantern he had produced from his pocket—examined it, not hurriedly, as Lord St. Croix had done, but very minutely, inch by inch, like some Red Indian searching out the trail of his enemy.

At last a very curious discovery rewarded his efforts, and, accustomed as the detective had grown to strange results, he was hardly prepared for this one. He found that a tree, quite close to the spot where he had seen the unearthly-looking figure disappear, was hollow, and that at the back of it—that is to say, on the side farthest from the gate leading into the plantation—there was an aperture large enough to admit any ordinary sized man or woman. Nor was this all, for inside the aperture was a well, or what was supposed to be a well, for it was now empty, and it was doubtful, indeed, whether it had ever been otherwise.

"Hum!" muttered Wise, after making as close an investigation as circumstances permitted. "Probably this leads to a subterranean passage, connected with the vaults that I have heard are built under the Court, and the supposed ghost has taken advantage of it, because it gives her—I'm sure it is a she—the chance of going in and out when she likes without being observed. A clever woman—a very clever woman indeed, and a brave one, too, but I shall be even with her yet, or my name's not Jonathan Wise. How she gets up and down puzzles me, though."

With the aid of his lantern he again pur-

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sued his investigations, in which he was now thoroughly interested; and certainly, if he did not succeed in the task he had set himself, it would not be for want of zeal and perseverance.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

ON the following morning, as they were at breakfast, a man rode up hastily to the front door of Woodleigh Court, and dismounting, asked to see Sir Trarice on business of the utmost importance.

"Dear me!" said Ermentrude, who had heard the request. "I wonder what is the matter at Wyndham Abbey—for the man is one of Squire Wyndham's servants, and he looked as if he were the bearer of ill news."

Sir Trarice—who, it may be observed, was one of the county magistrates—got up, and went out into the hall where the messenger (who was no other than the under-keeper, Dale) was waiting, looking, as Ermentrude had remarked, pale and frightened.

"If you please, Sir Trarice," he began, touching his hat, "Miss Marjorie sent me to ask you to come over without delay, for an awful thing has happened, and the poor Squire is so upset that he doesn't know what to do!"

"An awful thing. What do you mean, Dale?"

"It's murder, Sir Trarice!" answered the man, lowering his voice, as if the words were too terrible to be spoken aloud.

The baronet started back in horror.

"Murder, Dale?"

"Yes, sir, nothing more nor less; and it's the poor lady who lived at the Lodge—Mrs. Fanning she called herself, although goodness only knows what her real name may have been!"

"And she is dead, you say?"

"Dead as a door-nail—begging your pardon, sir—stabbed to the heart with some foreign sort of knife—a dagger or stiletto, or something of that kind—which went clean through her breast, and must have killed her at once, poor thing!"

"Good heavens!" murmured the Baronet, sinking into an armchair, and rendered momentarily powerless by the awful nature of the intelligence just given him.

Murder read of in the newspaper, and murder committed within a mile or so of your own door, are widely different things, and the Baronet, whose magisterial experiences had dealt for the most part with poaching delinquencies, and refractory labourers and schoolboys who employed their leisure in swarming lamp-posts and throwing stones, felt himself actually helpless before this terrible calamity.

At that moment the breakfast-room door opened, and the secretary, Villari, came out, Sir Trarice, who was really rather attached to him, signalled him to his side, and in few words repeated Dale's story, which, it is needless to say, the Italian received with a horror similar to his own.

"I suppose I shall have to go over to Wyndham Abbey, and see what is to be done," added the Baronet, slowly recovering from his helpless amazement. "Not that I am likely to be of much use, seeing that I have never been concerned in such a case before; but it will be better than leaving the poor Squire all to himself. Will you tell Jenkins to saddle Castor immediately?"

"Did you not send Jenkins in to Blackminster this morning to fetch the books which were to arrive from London?" asked the secretary, in the customary soft and respectful voice.

"Oh, yes—I had forgotten. And the other groom is ill. How tiresome!" ex-

claimed the Baronet, in vexation. "I dare not trust one of the stable-boys to saddle Castor, so I suppose I must do it myself."

"I will do it if you will allow me," observed Villari, and Sir Trarice at once consented, glad to be relieved from the trouble.

"Now tell me all you know about this terrible affair?" he said to Dale, after the secretary had disappeared in the direction of the stables.

"It is not much, Sir Trarice, all told. It seems that Mrs. Fanning kept one little servant, a girl out of the village, named Bessie Webber, and yesterday this girl asked if she might go and see her sister, who was very ill. Her mistress gave her leave, and also said she might stay the night with her sister if she would be back in time to light the fire in the morning, and get breakfast, which Bessie promised to do. Well, she went away about seven o'clock in the evening, leaving a visitor with Mrs. Fanning, and she came back at half-past six this morning, having sat up all night with her sick sister. To her surprise, she found the front door unlocked, but still it did not make her suspicious, for you know how careless we all are about locks and bolts and that sort of thing in the country, sir; and so she went on into the kitchen, where everything was just as usual, and lighted the kitchen fire, and made a cup of tea, which she proceeded to carry to her mistress according to custom. But when she got to the bedroom she discovered it was empty, and more than that, the bed had never been slept in, so she became rather alarmed, and hurried downstairs to the little parlour, and there she found her mistress—"

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir, quite dead and cold, lying on the floor, just as she had fallen, with the dagger beside her. Luckily, the girl was too frightened to move her, but she touched her cheek, and found it was icy, so from that she concluded she must be dead, and came running out into the wood to my cottage, which was nearest. And when I heard what she had got to say, I sent her on up to the Abbey, while I rode off into Blackminster to get Doctor Dawson, and to give the news at the police station. The doctor was at home, and came back with me, and we went together to the Lodge. He said the poor lady must have been dead some hours, for she was quite stiff, but that probably she passed away without so much as a sigh, for the knife had been driven in by a swift, sure hand, and death had been instantaneous."

"Poor thing! poor thing!" muttered Sir Trarice.

He did not know the murdered woman, but surely death is that one touch of nature which makes the whole world kin, and be the victim noble or humble, a sigh of pity is the least requiem we can give them.

A sudden idea struck him, and he got up.

"I will go round to the stables, and mount there," he said, "for if the ladies were to see me go off in such a hurry they would be alarmed, and I should have to tell them what was the matter."

"They will have to know, I suppose, sir!" observed the gamekeeper, respectfully.

"Yes! but I shall leave it to Mr. Villari to tell them, and he will break the news more gently than I should have time to do," answered the Baronet, leading the way to stable-yard, where the secretary was holding a saddled-horse by the bridle, and doing his best to soothe the animal, who appeared to be rather restive.

"I can't make out what ails Castor this morning," he remarked. "I fancy you

have not been riding him lately, for he seems excited. No doubt a good gallop will do him good."

"He had no exercise yesterday, so that explains it," replied Sir Trarice, carelessly; for his mind was too intent on the crime which it would be his duty to investigate, to dwell on the temper of his horses, and as he spoke he sprang into the saddle with considerably more lightness and agility than might have been expected from a man of his age, while the secretary stood watching him rather anxiously.

"I don't like the looks of that horse," he said, stepping back a few paces. "He is certainly fresher than he need be. Will you let me saddle one of the others for you, Sir Trarice?"

"Certainly not. It is not the first time I have mounted a spirited horse, and I don't in the least suppose Castor will prove too much for me. You are too nervous, Villari," said the Baronet, smiling with a slight consciousness of his good horsemanship.

At that moment Wise came sauntering slowly across the stable-yard, and the Baronet, seeing him, said to Villari,—

"Tell Wise about the murder, and ask him to follow us on to Wyndham Abbey. If he takes the short cut through the wood he will probably be there almost as soon as we shall, and it is just possible he may afford us some assistance. Not," he added, softly, "that I think he is particularly expert in his profession."

The secretary nodded, and then the Baronet rode off, and was presently joined by Dale, who had gone round to the front of the house, and mounted his horse during the colloquy that had just taken place between the Baronet and his secretary.

Sir Trarice beckoned him to come up to his side.

"I suppose," he said, "you have no idea who the wretch was that committed the murder?"

The gamekeeper hesitated ever so slightly.

"Well, sir, I have my opinion on the subject, but if you don't mind I would rather keep it to myself, for I shouldn't like to say anything that would prejudice you against anyone who may be as innocent as you or me, and it's quite true I have very little ground for my suspicions."

"Quite right, Dale!" said Sir Trarice, heartily. "I cannot blame your caution, and I shall doubtless learn all there is to be learnt presently from Squire Wyndham."

"It was Miss Marjorie that sent me to you, not the Squire," interpolated Dale, with some haste. "That Mr. Geoffrey Wyndham, who is staying at the Abbey—and behaves just as if he was lord and master over everything—was rather against my coming, but Miss Marjorie didn't take the least notice of what he said, but just said, in her quiet, proud way, 'You go to Woodleigh Court, Dale, and ask Sir Trarice to help us in our trouble,' and glad enough I was to hear her speak out like that, for that horse of yours is very spirited sir!"

This last remark was caused by Castor rearing suddenly straight up, and with such vigour that the Baronet was nearly thrown from the saddle. He recovered himself almost immediately, but there were traces of uneasiness visible in his face, as he gathered the reins more closely in his hands.

"Yes; I can't make it out, for as a rule he is quite easily managed. Perhaps in talking to you I pulled the curb, and that upset his temper. He'll be all right presently."

But he was not all right; he pranced and curvetted about, and tossed his head and coquetted with his shadow, and the Baronet



had quite as much as he could do to keep his seat.

"I say, Dale!" he exclaimed at last, struck with a sudden idea, "just ride on in front, and see if this animal has a white star on his forehead. I have been thinking that perhaps Villari has saddled Pollux instead of Castor."

The gamekeeper did as he was bidden. "No, Sir Travice; the white star is there."

Sir Travice looked relieved, for they were now coming to a field in which a threshing machine was at work, and good horseman as he was, he would certainly have refused to ride Pollux past it.

"It's all play," he explained to Dale, "the horse has really no vice in him."

"Hum," muttered the keeper, grimly. "I'm not so sure of that, sir, for I don't at all like the looks of the whites of his eyes that he is showing. If he ain't vicious he looks it."

Hardly had the words passed his lips than the horse shied at the machine, and began rearing so violently that it is no exaggeration to say that it actually stood upright on its hind legs.

The keeper urged his own steed forward, and endeavoured to snatch at the bridle, but before he could accomplish this, the end he had feared arrived, and Sir Travice was thrown violently from his saddle, and lay senseless in the middle of the road, while the horse, infuriated by the whirr-r-r of the threshing machine started off at a mad gallop, which soon took him out of sight.

But he was not lost, for, as it happened, Wise—who had taken the short cut through the wood—came out of the gate just as the animal covered with foam, and its sides panting, stopped from sheer exhaustion at the top of a rather steep hill. The detective, who was more or less used to horses, contrived to get hold of the reins, which attention the animal acknowledged by lashing out with its forelegs.

"Hulloa!" said Wise, dodging with much agility. "I fear our friend the Italian made a mistake while saddling the horse, for judging from his behaviour this must be Pollux and not Castor, and I am afraid something bad must have happened to Sir Travice."

He was, of course, aware of the point of difference between the two animals—namely, the white star on the forehead, and as he concluded this reflection, put up his finger and touched the mark.

It was stiff and sticky, and something white came off on his finger.

"Ah! I thought so. Trickery has been at work, and the star has been painted. Who has done it, I wonder. Mrs. Seymour, or that smooth-spoken Italian? Whichever it is, I'm afraid their villainous design has been only too successful, but I'm blessed"—only the detective used another adjective—"if I don't run 'em to earth, and make 'em suffer for it in the end!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

IRENE, after drinking the coffee, had just strength enough to struggle upstairs, and was met on the landing by the dirty little servant, Euphemia, who, seeing how pale and dazed-looking she was, gave her her arm into the bedroom.

"Ain't you well?" she asked, with some concern, for she had taken a strange kind of fancy to Irene, whose delicate loveliness she regarded as she might have regarded some wonderful tropical flower, such as she had never seen before. "Are you sick?"

"Very, and frightened—oh, so frightened!" exclaimed the young girl, with a sudden access of terror for which she herself could hardly have accounted. It may

be that, in a vague sort of way, she suspected some opiate had been administered to her, and she was filled with such bewildered helplessness as comes to us when we find ourselves in the dark, and in a perfectly strange place, where a step forward or backward may lead us into untold peril. "I feel so sleepy that I cannot keep awake, and I don't know what may happen to me if I once become insensible. Can't you help me—oh I can't you help me?"

Evidently the drug had already had some of its effect on her senses, or she would not have made this appeal to a creature well-nigh as helpless as herself. But as poverty gives us strange companions, so may desperation lead to strange friends.

Euphemia shook her head.

"What can I do, miss?" I might run and fetch a bobby if you liked, tho' Mrs. Marlow would beat me within an inch of my life afterwards."

"It would be no good," sighed Irene, heavily, but struggling with all her might against the deadly stupor that was creeping over her. "If anyone came, Mrs. Sumner would have some plausible tale ready, so as to prevent interference, and it would only make matters worse. I feel I shall be fast asleep in a few moments. Will you stay with me as long as you can?"

"Yes, till they makes me go away," responded Euphemia. Then a happy thought struck her. "If you feel sleepy and don't want to go to sleep, why don't you slosh your head in cold water?"

The suggestion was a good one, and Irene went to the little washstand and poured the water over her golden head, first of all unfastening her dress, and slipping it down on her shoulders, so as not to wet it. As she did so a card fell out and lay on the ground at her feet, until it was observed and picked up by Euphemia.

But whatever effect cold water may have in driving away a natural sleepiness, it was useless against the subtle influence of the drug Mrs. Sumner had administered, and even while she bent her head over the basin Irene felt that the effort would be in vain.

"It is no good," she murmured, drowsily, and even while she spoke she staggered towards the bed, fell across it, and in a few mere seconds was in a profound slumber.

Euphemia remained for a little while, gazing at her in most unmitigated perplexity. That some kind of treachery had been going on she felt assured; but however much she might wish to assist the poor, innocent victim, she was virtually helpless, for who would believe her word when it was flatly contradicted by her mistress—as would surely be the case?

Besides, what was there for her to say? That a girl had been brought to the house, and had fallen into a sleep which she—Euphemia—did not believe to be natural!

A policeman would pooh-pooh the story, and the neighbours would most certainly decline to interfere in such a matter.

"Poor thing!" muttered Euphemia. "She looks for all the world like a wax-work."

The comparison was not a very apt one, for although Irene's eyes were closed, and the long velvet shadow of her dark lashes lay on her cheek, her expression was still one of troubled perplexity, and there was a little line in the smoothness of her white brow.

But, for all that, she looked inexpressibly lovely. There was a faint, wild rose-colour in her cheeks, and her finely-chiselled lips

were slightly apart, while her white bosom heaved rather more quickly than it would have done had her sleep been perfectly natural.

"I'd help her if I could," soliloquised Euphemia, biting her nails in uncertainty. "She's so sweet and pretty, poor thing! But I don't see what I can do—really I don't."

Her eyes suddenly fell on the card she had picked up, and which she now held in her hand. As it happened, she could read and write a little, having in her early childhood been sent to a board school, before she fell into the tender clutches of Mrs. Marlow, of course.

"H-a-r-o-l-d S-t. C-r-o-i-x," she spelled out, slowly. "Harold St. Croix! Well, that's a funny name! 'Carlton Club.' Where's that, I wonder?"

She remained pondering for a few minutes, staring intently at the card the while.

"P'raps he's a friend of her's—p'raps he's her young man! That's most likely, considering that she keeps his card inside her body, and, if that's so, I'd better write to him. Anyhow, I'll keep the address, and wait and see what happens."

She had hardly arrived at this conclusion before the door was pushed stealthily open, and Mrs. Sumner walked on tip-toe into the chamber.

"Hulloa! What brings you here?" she asked, by no means pleased to see the apartment already invaded.

"The young lady was took bad, and I helped her," answered Euphemia, sulkily. "I don't believe as it's all right with her. Hadn't I better go and fetch a doctor?"

"A doctor! Certainly not. What do we want with a doctor? The young lady is all right, as you could see if you had any brains in your stupid head. There! get along downstairs to your work, instead of lazying here."

As the girl evinced no symptoms of obeying this mandate, the speaker took her by the shoulders, and forcibly pushed her outside the door to the top of the stairs.

"Mrs. Marlow," she called out. "Here's this servant of yours idling away her time up here. Haven't you anything for her to do downstairs?"

"To be sure I have, the lazy hussy!" promptly responded Mrs. Marlow, appearing at the foot of the stairs. "You come and wash up in the kitchen, you impudent thing, you! What do you mean skulking about in the lady's room, when there's enough work to last you a fortnit? D'ye think I pay you your wages for doing nothin' but eat and drink as much as ever you can, and then cheek me? I'll give it you when I gets hold of you, see if I don't!"

Euphemia hesitated a moment between the angry woman at the bottom of the stairs and the quietly determined one at the top. She was between Scylla and Charybdis, but of the two she preferred the former, so she slipped quietly down, neatly dodged Mrs. Marlow's threatening arm, and went to the dirty little dark hole, dignified by the name of kitchen, whither her mistress followed, and watched over her while she "washed up."

And so poor Irene was entirely at the mercy of her enemies.

When her senses returned to her, she found herself in the dark, and in a strange place, for as her eyes gradually became accustomed to the gloom she managed to distinguish the form of the objects about her, and they certainly did not represent the little bedroom in which she had slept at Mrs. Marlow's.

"Where am I—who is here?" she cried out, breathlessly, for some instinct told her

she was not alone, and as she spoke she raised herself on her elbow, and tried to look around.

"Oh, so you are awake!" said the voice of Mrs. Sumner from the other side of the cabin—for such it was. "You needn't think of getting up yet—it is quite early, so go to sleep again."

"But where am I?"

"Don't ask questions now. I am sleepy myself, and when morning comes I'll explain your position to you," was the reply, and as she spoke Mrs. Sumner turned over, apparently for the purpose of resuming her broken slumber—secure in the belief that her prisoner could not escape, for the very simple reason that the door was locked, and the key reposed under her own pillow.

Irene was silent, conscious that remonstrance would be useless, but she listened intently, and presently became aware that they must either be on a river or the sea, for she distinctly heard the wash of the water against the vessel's side, and as she became more fully awake felt the motion of the ship itself.

Then her suspicion had been correct, and she had been drugged in order to be got on board this vessel, which was bearing her way from England—away from all chances of help!

Her heart sank with a terrible sense of desolation and despair. Never till now had she thoroughly realised the perfect helplessness of her position, but with the sudden consciousness of how pitilessly Mrs. Sumner accomplished her will came a sickening terror of this quiet, grim woman, who hesitated at nothing that stood in her path, and swept all obstacles aside with the supremacy of Fate itself.

She sprang up and groped about in the darkness until she came to the door, which of course resisted all her efforts to unfasten, and then she crept quietly back to her berth, and lay there till morning, a dumb misery filling her breast, and a sort of apathetic resignation to a destiny which it seemed useless to try and resist.

At length the cold, grey dawn gave place to morning light, but the cabin was still in semi-darkness, for the skylight above was covered over, and, added to this, the morning itself was damp and misty.

Mrs. Sumner, who had not even unfastened her dress while she slept, rose, and lighted a small hanging lamp, and then proceeded to wash herself, and smooth her hair before a tiny pocket mirror with which she had provided herself. After this she turned to Irene, who was lying with miserable, wide-open eyes in her berth.

"You had better get up, and arrange your toilet," she observed, in her usual quiet tones; "meanwhile I will go and see about some breakfast."

She was absent about ten minutes, and on her return found the girl still in the same position—indeed, she seemed in a sort of lethargy, and almost unconscious of what was going on around her.

"Still under the influence of the opiate," reflected Mrs. Sumner. "It is just as well, for it will keep her quiet, and perhaps I shall not have to give her another dose."

Aloud she said,—

"Won't you have something to eat, Irene?"

The girl made a movement of dissent—the sight of food at the present moment almost made her sick.

"Drink some coffee, then."

But the remembrance of the last coffee she had taken induced her to refuse this also, and so Mrs. Sumner sat down, and had her breakfast alone.

At last Irene spoke.

"What is the time?"

Mrs. Sumner glanced at the neat little silver watch she wore at her waist.

"It is half-past eight."

Again there was silence, and it lasted for about half-an-hour, and was finally broken by the elder woman, who had by this time finished her breakfast.

"Do you know where you are, Irene?"

"No," apathetically. "On my way to Australia, perhaps."

"As it happens, you are right," was the calm retort. "I did not think that I ought to let your scruples interfere with what I knew to be best for you, and so I have taken measures which you may think harsh, but which you will later, or, confess were for your truest interest."

A faintly scornful smile played round the young girl's mouth, but it vanished almost directly.

"And are you coming, too?" she asked.

"No, but James Marlow is the commander of this vessel, and he will take care of you, and see you safely into the hands of the friends who are ready to receive you at Melbourne."

Irene shivered, and her eyelids were raised for a moment, while a flash came in her blue eyes that the woman watching her could hardly understand.

"You will write to me when you get to Melbourne," added Mrs. Sumner, in the same equable tone as she had before spoken in, "and direct the letter to the care of Mrs. Marlow, for I am going to leave W—shire, and for the present shall have no definite address. In due time it is possible I may come to Australia to you, but it will not be yet—not for a year or two, certainly." Still no reply from the quiet recumbent figure.

"I am sure that when you get out there you will be grateful to me for sending you. It is possible that some respectable man of your own class may fall in love with you, and wish to make you his wife, and in that case you may let me know, so that I may send you the wedding present I have put by in the savings bank for you. It is not much, it is true—a hundred and fifty pounds, perhaps—but it is better than nothing at all, and will help to set you up in house-keeping. I—"

"Stop!" cried Irene, with sharp authority, and she rose from her berth and stood up, steadying herself (for she was still giddy) by the edge of the table. "Since I am in your power, and—as it seems—beyond the reach of help, you shall, at least, hear my true sentiments towards you, so that if you have any idea you have imposed on my credulity with your hypocrisy, you may for once be undeceived. You have caught me as a hunter snares his victim, and I am equally helpless in your hands, but never for one moment have you made me think you have any interest in my welfare, or any feeling for me beyond a sincere desire never to look upon my face again. In point of fact, you hate me! I see it in your eyes, I hear it in your voice, and I feel it in my own heart. Well, it simply means that I am alone in the world, and have no friend to look to for help, but at the same time I have no responsibilities, for I owe you no duty, and therefore your wishes will have no effect whatever on my actions. You may send me to Australia, but I shall return at the very first opportunity, and it shall be the business of my life to discover your motive for getting rid of me. It may be true that I am your sister's daughter—although I doubt the fact—but there is, there must be, some reason for your conduct, and I will find it out!"

As she was speaking, Mrs. Sumner had started to her feet, and in her rage she let slip the mask she had hitherto worn so

carefully. Her eyes actually blazed with malignancy, her very lips grew pale, she trembled, and became white with excess of fury.

"You little fiend!" she cried out, seizing Irene's arm, and bruising the delicate flesh in her rough grasp. "How dare you go on defying me? Have I not shown you that I am your master—aye, and will continue to be so to the end of the chapter!"

The girl never flinched, but returned her gaze with undaunted courage.

"We shall see," she returned. "Loose your hold of my arm, if you please—you hurt me!"

The woman flung the bruised wrist from her, and then recovered her self-possession.

"Why do you make me so angry, Irene? Your abominable obstinacy forces me to speak and act towards you in a manner that is repugnant to me. I am your friend, and yet you could not treat your truest enemy with more contempt."

Irene did not reply, but proceeded to fasten up the long golden strands of her hair that were now falling loosely over her shoulders. She had said all she wished to say, and it was not worth while wasting any more words, seeing they had no greater effect than rain on a rock.

By this time the influence of the drug was wearing off, and her thoughts had, in a degree, collected themselves. She did not feel quite so helpless as she had done in her first moments of awakening, and had determined to go on deck, and see if she could not prevail on the captain or some of the men to aid her. It was a very slender thread of hope on which to rely, but drowning men will clutch at straws when there is nothing else to hold by.

Presently Mrs. Sumner got up, and left the cabin, and Irene immediately flew to the door, and tried it. Alas! it was bolted on the outside, and as there was no other exit, escape seemed impossible.

The girl stood a moment, debating with herself, then raised her voice, and screamed as loudly as she could—again, and again, and again—until she grew exhausted, but her screams elicited no response whatever, and finally she ceased, and began shaking the door with all her strength, in the hope that the bolt might possibly be a slender one, and yield to her efforts.

But this attempt was equally vain. Still she did not feel nearly so despairing as she had done at first, for the mere sense of making an effort helped to raise her spirits; and, besides, it seemed impossible that in this nineteenth century of ours, any girl could be kidnapped and sent away to a foreign land against her will, no matter what the power of her unscrupulous enemies might be.

In about an hour Mrs. Sumner returned, and this time with her bonnet and cloak on, for Marlow had told her that as they had a fair wind, it was probable the tug would cast them off very soon, and she must, therefore, prepare herself for an immediate departure.

"I hope by this time that you have convinced yourself of the folly of making such a noise," she observed, calmly. "Luckily, no one has taken any notice of you, for the crew believe you to be a sister of Marlow's, who is occasionally not quite right in her head, and who he is taking out to Australia for the benefit of her health, so that any efforts on your part to deceive them will be worse than useless, and any pitiful story you may choose to relate will only serve to convince them the more of your insanity. You see, I have guarded against all contingencies that I have been able to foresee, and now that I am going to leave you, I want to shake hands and bid you an affectionate



good-bye, in the perfect assurance that presently you will regard me with friendly feelings, and even thank me for all the trouble I have taken for you."

The woman kept up her hypocrisy to the last, and spoke with a quiet assumption of good faith that might actually have deceived an onlooker had there been one present.

Irene cast upon her a glance of deepest scorn.

"I shall neither shake hands with you, nor wish you good bye," she responded, quietly, "for to do either would be a spoken or an acted falsehood. So far your wickedness has triumphed, but"—she raised her finger to give emphasis to her words—"I am convinced that such wickedness will in the end provoke Heaven's vengeance, and I must be content to wait until that day comes."

Mrs. Sumner's eyes drooped uneasily before the young girl's steadfast gaze, and—perhaps to avoid it—she went over to the berth on which she had slept the preceding night, to pick up a handkerchief that was lying on the pillow.

In so doing her back was turned for a moment to Irene, who was thus nearer to the door, and who instantly took advantage of the fact to open it, and rush up the stairs on deck, where the first person she saw was a rough-looking sailor, who stopped short in amazement at so unexpected an apparition.

Excitement and the new-born hope of escape lent a certain wildness to the young girl's face and manner, and as she clasped the man's arm, with a frantic resolve that he should listen to her, he drew back, as if startled.

"Help me, oh, help me!" she cried, incoherently, for even as she spoke she saw Marlow advancing from the other end of the vessel. "I have been brought here by foul means, and they intend to take me to Australia. You who have sisters, or, perhaps, a wife of your own, have pity on me, and help me to escape them!"

Naturally her appeal, piteous as it was, sounded strange and even mad in the ears of the very practical and matter-of-fact person to whom it was addressed, and who looked exceedingly puzzled at the sudden and barely comprehended request.

"All right, missie," he replied, soothingly. "You ain't quite well now, perhaps, but you'll be all right presently! Why, bless ye! the voyage ain't nothink, and as for sea-sickness, it only lasts three days at the most, and when ye gets to Australia, you'll be that glad to leave England behind yer —"

He did not complete his sentence, for at that moment Marlow and Mrs. Sumner both stood at the girl's side, and the former said,—

"All right, Smith, the young lady's a bit off her head, so you mustn't take any notice of what she says. We're hoping great things from the Australian climate. Come, my dear," to Irene, "let me take you downstairs again; you had much better stay quietly in your cabin until we get well out to sea, and then you may come on deck as often as you like."

He took her by the arm, but the touch of an adder could not have inspired the girl with more repulsion, and shaking him off she sprang across the deck, and stood on the bulwarks, for she had seen another vessel astern, and it struck her that if she could only attract the attention of the captain or crew there might still be hope for her.

It was a sight never to be forgotten, that slight, girlish figure standing between the sea and sky, with arms outstretched, and wildly despairing blue eyes.

Another moment, and the slender form

swayed unsteadily to and fro; a loud, piercing cry rang out on the morning stillness, and Irene overbalanced herself, and fell into the spray-crested billows, that were breaking against the vessel's side.

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

Wise was not so foolish as to attempt to mount the horse he had captured, even though the animal bore marks of evident exhaustion, consequent on his mad race uphill.

The detective, although physically brave enough, had yet a very considerable regard for his own safety, and there was still a vicious exhibition of the whites of the eyes on the part of the animal, which warned him against giving him another chance of working mischief.

He therefore led him back along the highway to Woodleigh Court, and as he neared the house was met by Dale, the keeper, now on his way to Wyndham Abbey.

"Where's Sir Travice?" asked Wise, coming to a standstill.

"In bed. We have just brought him home in a dogcart that Farmer Owen lent us—it was near his house that Sir Travice was thrown."

"And is he hurt much?"

"A good deal, I'm afraid. The doctor has been sent for, but he hasn't come yet. However, Sir Travice seems to have gained consciousness, and we hope his hurt isn't serious. It's a wonder he didn't break his neck, though."

"How did the accident happen?" asked Wise.

"I can't stay to give you particulars now, for Miss Marjorie will wonder what has become of me, but the horse shied at a threshing machine—not that the threshing machine had much to do with the accident, for the brute was vicious enough to have shied at his own shadow, or a bird on a bush—never saw such a creature in my life. I warned Sir Travice, but he pooh-poohed what I said—more's the pity. I hope he'll get well, though, for he's a good sort, and there aren't many like him."

And with that the gamekeeper rode off, while Wise slowly led the horse round to the stable, thoughtfully deliberating the while.

The detective was in a dilemma. Convinced that treachery had been at work, and that the Baronet's accident was the result of deliberate intention, he yet could not make up his mind to whom he should confide his discovery, for, as a matter of fact, he was distrustful both of Mrs. Seymour and her daughter, and doubtful whether it would not be better to keep his new-acquired knowledge to himself, as a trump card to play by-and-by at the end of the game.

And yet, if he let the moment pass, when he could adduce proof of his words in the shape of, the painted star on the horse's forehead, the culprit might escape, for supposing Mrs. Seymour knew anything about it she would certainly deny it, and his word would not be taken when distinctly contradicted by hers.

In the stable yard he met Lord St. Croix. "Hullo, Wise, have you brought that brute back?" he said, as he saw the detective. "If I had my way I'd shoot him outright, and prevent any further mischief being done."

"I should like to shoot the real offender, my lord!" the detective replied, with emphasis. "Hanging wouldn't be too good for him, considering that he had murder in his heart."

"What do you mean?" asked the Viscount, and at that moment Villari came out of the house, and joined the group.

"Why, this! Some villain, knowing the two horses, Castor and Pollux, and aware that it was dangerous to ride the latter, painted a star on his forehead, so as to make him look like Castor, and then let Sir Travice ride him, doubtless hoping that something more serious than an accident might occur."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed St. Croix, starting back in undisguised horror. "Is this true?"

"Look for yourself, my lord. Don't go too near lest the vicious beast should kick out at you, but put your fingers to his forehead, and you'll soon see what I say is correct."

Lord St. Croix did as he was bidden, and when he drew his fingers away, sure enough they were white and sticky.

He drew a sharp breath, and his eyebrows met in a stern line above his angry eyes.

"Wise, if you can lay your hand on the scoundrel take me to him, and I'll thrash him within an inch of his life. Hanging's too good for such a sneaking, cowardly villain!"

"Right you are, my lord!" responded the detective, heartily; "and I only wish I could put you on his track, but—"

"Stay!" exclaimed Villari, speaking for the first time, "you have very much shocked and surprised me, for as it happened I was the one who saddled the horse this morning, and so I have innocently aided in the villainous plot. Great heavens! to think I have imperilled the life of my friend, my benefactor—"

He half turned away to conceal his emotion, and St. Croix, sincerely sorry for his grief, put his hand kindly on his shoulder.

"Come, come, Villari, it is not your fault, for even if anyone had saddled the horse the result would have been the same. I have heard Sir Travice declare over and over again that if the two horses were before him he should not be able to distinguish one from the other except by the white star."

"But if I had looked at the other I should have seen the white star, and then I might have guessed something was wrong. I have my own hasty carelessness to blame."

"I don't know so much about that," observed Wise, drily. "I daresay the very clever person who painted the white star on Pollux also painted it off Castor. However, we can soon see if such is the case."

He led the way to the loose box, where Castor was quietly munching, and then they found that his surmise was correct, for not even so much as a white hair was visible on the glossy chestnut.

"You see," he said, with some triumph in his voice, "all the possibilities were evidently considered before the plan was carried out."

"The wretch—the villain!" exclaimed Villari, in a sudden access of indignant wrath. Then he turned to Wise, and said earnestly, "Have you no suspicion as to the culprit?"

The detective looked him full in the face, with a somewhat peculiar earnestness, but the Italian's lustrous eyes never flinched before his gaze.

"I have a suspicion, sir," returned Wise, shortly.

"And the person is—"

"That is my business," answered the detective, turning Pollux into his box, and closing the door; "I will take the key of the stables for the present and keep it. This is an eventful morning, my lord," he added to the Viscount, who looked gloomily meditative.

"You are right," he answered, and then

he fell to thinking with a sort of wonder, of the many things that had taken place in the last two months, and came to the conclusion that he did not like Woodleigh Court. It was too full of mysteries, which had been up to the present insoluble.

"I want your advice, my lord," said Wise, ignoring the presence of the secretary. "What shall I do in this matter?"

"Report it to the police at Blackminster," was the prompt rejoinder.

Wise shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think that would help us much," he observed drily, "nor was it exactly what I meant. Shall I consult Mrs. Seymour or not?"

"Mrs. Seymour is very much worried just now, and is in attendance on Sir Travice," put in the secretary, in his usual gently suave voice. "Don't you think it would be cruel to disturb her with further anxieties?"

Wise flashed upon him a sharp glance of inquiry.

"Are they in league together?" he wondered to himself; but aloud, he said, "What is your opinion, Lord St. Croix?"

"I am inclined to agree with Mr. Villari. Mrs. Seymour is in great trouble concerning Sir Travice, and will be until the doctor has been and given his verdict, so that I think it would be better to keep this affair from her until after his visit."

"Very well, I will take your advice," the detective returned, and thereupon went into the Court by the back way.

In the passage he was met by a sharp-nosed, angular female, who was a sort of sewing maid, and whose acquaintance Wise had lately cultivated very assiduously.

"I've got something to say to you, Mr. Wise, if you'll just step inside," she said, with a coquettish smile, as she led the way into a small apartment, littered over with odds and ends of dressmaking. "But how gloomy you look!"

"So I am, my dear; it's because I haven't seen you for such a long time," he responded, briskly; and thereupon—*we* blush to relate such a thing of the staid, middle-aged detective—he imprinted a kiss on the sewing-maid's not very inviting cheek.

"Lor, Mr. Wise, how can you do such things? You make me ashamed, that you do!" exclaimed the young lady, bashfully; but though she was ashamed she did not try to get away from her admirer—in fact, she edged a little closer!

"You shouldn't wear such a becoming cap, and such a pretty apron if you don't want to be admired," said the detective; "but now let's come to business, for we may be interrupted at any moment."

"No danger. The house is all upside down, because of poor Sir Travice's accident."

"All the more reason why somebody may pop in here to have a talk with you about it. Have you found out where that bit of lace came from?"

It may be mentioned that the lace referred to was the scrap found by the detective hanging on a bush in the plantation.

"Well, I can't say that exactly, but I have found out that Mrs. Seymour has some lace of exactly the same pattern."

"But not torn?"

"No—or, at least, I couldn't see the tear. Still, it is possible that she may have put the torn part away."

"Not only possible, but probable," the detective muttered to himself, "for she is a clever woman, and would not neglect any chance of concealment. Well, I am much obliged to you, Amelia. Give me another kiss, my dear; and if you should happen to put your hands on the identical lace from which this bit was torn, just procure it for me, and I'll see that you are never blamed."

Amelia was not over-pleased at such an abrupt termination to the interview; and the detective, seeing signs of dissatisfaction on her face, gave her an extra kiss by way of consolation.

"I can't stay any longer now, my dear, for I have a good many things to see to, but perhaps, on Sunday afternoon, we might take a walk together," he observed, as he left the room. Outside he smiled grimly. "I might do worse than marry her, for she would make a first-rate female detective; but I'm afraid she's two vinegary—yes, a great deal too vinegary."

He shook his head as he arrived at this conclusion; but a minute later all thoughts of Amelia and personal matters had vanished from his mind in the anxieties that beset him.

As a matter of fact, he was devoted to his profession, and had grown to take a deep interest in this "Woodleigh Court Case," as he called it.

But just now he was in the difficult position of a man who holds several ends of a tangled skein in his hands, and knows not which one to pursue for fear he may take the wrong one, and thus lose the clue.

He was really anxious to go over to Wyndham Abbey, and hear all there was to be told about the murder; but prudence cautioned him not to leave the Court at this juncture, so he seated himself behind the curtains in a window recess just outside Sir Travice's bedroom, and determined to wait until after the doctor had been.

The Baronet was lying on the bed, only partially undressed, and in a semi-comatose state, while Mrs. Seymour and her daughter stood at the window discussing his case.

There was no one else in the room, and mother and daughter had been silent for some time, watching the quiet figure on the bed, and listening to his stertorous breathing.

"Do you think he will die?" whispered Ermentrude, at last.

Mrs. Seymour shook her head.

"I cannot tell; but such an accident at his time of life cannot be otherwise than serious. I shall be glad when Dr. Wootton comes, and this suspense is at an end."

Again there was silence, and again it was the younger woman who broke it.

"If—if he should die I shall inherit his money, shall I not?"

"You will, for the will by which he makes you his heiress is duly signed and sealed. 'Yes,'—Mrs. Seymour's dark eyes sparkled triumphantly—"whatever happens now we are safe. How different it would have been if this accident had taken place a week or two ago!"

Not a word of pity on the part of either for the man who had been so good to them, whose house had been their home, and whose purse had always opened at their command!

Indeed, both were so wrapped up in their own selfish thoughts, and speculation on what would happen supposing Sir Travice died, that they could not spare a single sigh for the sufferer, and it would have been difficult to say which was the more callous of the two, for the ideas of both mother and daughter tended in the same direction.

"If Sir Travice dies my future is secure—far more secure than if he lives."

Suddenly there came a hasty step outside and a quick knock at the door, followed by the entrance of a tall, genial-looking, white-haired man, who advanced to the bedside, with anxiety clearly written on his features.

It was the doctor.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 1989. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.)

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## AN APPALLING DISCOVERY

A short time previous there was no one happier than he; his path was strewn with roses, and his joy seemed likely to bless him continuously. Then, like

## A THUNDERBOLT

the forerunner of a startling tragedy, burst suddenly upon this man and in a brief period he became

## CRUSHED, BUT NOT HOPELESS

The outline of this perplexing tragedy is embraced in the opening instalment of the romance, and so vividly and sympathetically is it depicted, with descriptive powers which never fail to enthrall and delight, that the reader is held spellbound, eager to discover the explanation of the tantalizing mystery.

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## Gleanings

**JAPANESE** young girls, when they desire to look extremely captivating, gild their lips.

**ENGLISH** convicts get ten pounds of bread a week, while paupers receive only seven pounds.

In the schools of Russia pupils are permitted to choose between learning French and German, and seventy per cent choose German.

THE Salvation Army has representatives at work in forty-seven different countries, and issues forty-five periodicals, printed in twenty-one languages.

**STINGLESS** bees have been found in the Island of Montserrat, and British naturalists are trying to encourage the propagation of the breed, with the hope of supplanting the bees which have stings.

THE deposits at the mouth of the Po, in Italy, have caused the coast to gain upon the sea so rapidly that a point which in the time of Augustus was a seaport town is now eighteen miles from the Adriatic.

A HUGE block of granite, the largest ever quarried, is to be used in the construction of the Beachy Head lighthouse. It came from Cornwall, weighs 1,400 tons, and is 68 feet long, 20 feet wide and 14 feet in thickness.

As a precaution against disease, it was the custom of Nero to have his drinking water boiled, and then cooled by placing it in flasks packed in snow. This plan did not lengthen his life, however, for he closed his career with his own hand at the age of thirty-one.

THE telephonograph is an improvement upon the telephone, and is coming into use in Berlin. When a person speaks through a telephone, and the person whom he desires to communicate with is absent, the message is printed by a tape machine, and he may read it on his return.

**QUEER CHINESE CUSTOMS.**—They drink wine hot.

Old men fly kites.  
White is worn as mourning.  
Their babies seldom cry.  
Soldiers wear petticoats.  
Their compass points to the south.  
The family name commences first.  
Carriages are moved by sails.  
Seat of honor at the left.  
Visiting cards four feet long.  
School children sit with backs to the teacher.

Fireworks are always set off in daytime.  
If you offend a Chinaman he may kill himself on your doorstep to spite you.

It is strange, but true, that the simple action of ascending a flight of stairs requires the exertion of seven times the amount of strength necessary for traversing an equal distance on a straight road. People who thoughtlessly cause servants or others dependent upon their will to perform journeys up and downstairs, which a little forethought or consideration on their part might prevent, would do well to remember this, and be more careful not to cause such a waste of strength.

THE latest fad among wealthy women is to have a silver model of their pet dogs and cats. The model is made small, for an ornament, while the pet is alive, or after its death a life-size and exact model is made of silver, and this takes the place of the stuffed and mounted pet formerly popular. The Duchess of Newcastle is said to be the possessor of the largest silver model of this kind ever made. It is a reproduction of a Russian wolfhound, very large and handsome. The models in silver are quite expensive, costing anywhere from two hundred to two thousand dollars.

THE oldest jewel in the British Crown is the famous ruby composing the centre of the Maltese Cross in the front of the crown. It was given to Edward Prince of Wales, son of Edward III., called the Black Prince, by Don Pedro, King of Castile, after the battle of Najera, A.D. 1367. This ruby was worn in the helmet of Henry V., at the battle of Agincourt, on October 25th, 1415, when Henry, with only 15,000 men, defeated the French Army of over 50,000. The crown contains, besides the famous ruby, 17 sapphires, 11 emeralds, 4 rubies, 1,368 brilliant diamonds, 277 pearls, set in silver and gold. It has a crimson velvet cap, with ermine border, and lined with white silk. Its gross weight is 39 ounces and 5 pennyweights troy.

**RETURNING SOLDIERS ONLY HALF SHAVED.**  
—On the returning troopships from South Africa the merry English soldiers are given to pranks. None of the men on the ships recently in, had shaved on the voyage till they neared Southampton, when there was a general request for razors. It happened that there was only one to be had, all the others probably being packed away with the heavy luggage in the hold. The holder of the solitary razor consented to lend it round, but on condition that each one should shave half his face at one turn, the owner then to have first use. He carefully shaved one half of his face, and then passed the razor on. In due time the razor came back to its owner, who at once trimmed the other side of his face, and then tossed the razor into the sea. How they all groaned! And yet they never laughed more than they did after they got over the first shock. When they landed every man seemed to have a bad headache, to judge from the handkerchiefs and scarfs which were held up, and there was an immediate rush to the nearest barber shops.

THE sunflower is highly valued in America and it can be grown successfully over large areas. It is a crop which makes considerable drain upon the soil; but its principal value lies in the oil which can be expressed from its seeds. At present Russia is the only country where the sunflower is cultivated on economic grounds, and there it has assumed the proportions of a great agricultural industry. The seeds of the sunflower are considered beneficial to poultry and to birds generally, and they are also of medicinal value in the treatment of farm animals.

### MAXIMS OF LIFE.

These are Sir John Sawyer's nineteen rules for living 100 years:—

1. Eight hours' sleep.
2. Sleep on your right side.
3. Keep your bedroom window open all night.
4. Have a mat to your bedroom door.
5. Do not have your bedstead against the wall.
6. No cold water in the morning, but a bath at the temperature of the body.
7. Exercise before breakfast.
8. Eat little meat, and see that it is well cooked.
9. (For adults) Drink no milk.
10. Eat plenty of fat to feed the cells which destroy disease germs.
11. Avoid intoxicants, which destroy those cells.
12. Daily exercise in the open air.
13. Allow no pet animals in your living-rooms.
14. Live in the country if you can.
15. Watch the three D's—drinking water, damp, drains.
16. Have change of occupation.
17. Take frequent and short holidays.
18. Limit your ambitions.
19. Keep your temper.

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## Society

THE date of the Coronation is still the subject of a good deal of rash speculation. It has been persistently stated that the event will take place on a Saturday, one date being given as May 21, and another as June 28. Neither is likely to be correct, for there are many objections to a Saturday ceremony. It is said the King favours Wednesday, and it is expected that June 25 will be selected as the date.

The head of the House of Bonaparte, Prince Napoleon, as he is now called is a very handsome man. He is tall and well made, the upper part of the face being astonishingly like that of Napoleon I., whereas the lower, with its sweeping moustache, bears a strong resemblance to the Prince's grandfather, Victor Emanuel II. Prince Napoleon, who is a student, speaks English, Italian, and German with remarkable fluency. He is an enthusiastic lover of pictures and bric-a-brac, but has little or no ear for music, although the sound of a military band has an attraction for him.

ONE great anniversary which has been celebrated for the last sixty-three years, was not, in the nature of things, observed this year, for another Accession Day has taken its place in the calendar. But "Queen Victoria's Day," as June 22, which falls two days later, was titled in 1897, might very fitly be celebrated, unless, indeed, it is his Majesty's intention to fix May 21 as a permanent memorial to the late Sovereign. Less than a week separates June 22 and the anniversary of Coronation Day in 1838. The crowning of their Majesties next year will approximate to this date; but it is not likely to be identical with it.

A ROYAL event appearing in the calendar under the date June 20 as "Tr. of King Edward," might very well as a festival disappear from our annals. This, it need scarcely be said, has no reference to Edward VII., but alludes to the translation of Edward, surnamed the Confessor, the last Anglo-Saxon King of the old Royal line. He was not a very heroic figure. As Freeman says, "He was a poor and spiritless King, who for his monklike virtues was canonised by Alexander III. in 1161."

It has been decided that the Duke and Duchess of York shall visit Capetown, and they are due to arrive at Simonstown on August 17th. When their Royal Highnesses visited the Wairoa Geyser, New Zealand, the Duchess threw in a piece of soap and the Geyser threw up a column of boiling water over 100 feet high.

THREE hundred and thirty-five years on June 19th was born one of the least worthy of our Kings, whose existence, however, is yet a factor of importance in Europe, James I. His grandfather, James V. of Scotland, was the only child of his family who survived infancy; that King's daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, was in the same condition; James I. was her only child; yet, in spite of this narrow line, continued through three generations James V., his daughter, and his grandson are the bodily ancestors of every princely person in this year's "Almanack de Gotha," save, perhaps, the House of Lippe, some branches of Reuss, and the Sovereigns of Montenegro and Serbia. King Edward VII., Kaiser Wilhelm, the Tzar, the Emperor of Austria, the King of Italy, the Bourbons, the lesser German Sovereigns, and even the Bonaparte Pretender—all have the blood of James I. in their veins.

## Statistics

### AMERICAN V. ENGLISH LOCOMOTIVES.

Since the beginning of 1900 the Midland Railway Company has been running thirty Baldwin's locomotives from Philadelphia, and ten from the Schenectady Locomotive Works in New York State. The chairman of the Company and the Locomotive Superintendent have just given the results of their workings, as compared with the English engines. Although each American locomotive was £400 cheaper than the British engines, they are "heavier in fuel, in oil, and in repairs." The following shows the extra working cost of an American engine over an English engine:—

Fuel.....	20-25 per cent.
Oil.....	50 "
Repairs.....	60 "

It is acknowledged that the American engines are good engines and work their trains satisfactorily, but their inferiority on the three points named is, it is held, uncontested. "In America you go and take an engine off the peg, as it were, and from then onwards work it right out till it dies, giving it no rest. Their contention is that by the time it is done for and worn out something better will have come along. On the other hand, we make our engines as good as we possibly can to start with, and then we tend them most carefully, rest them, clean them out, and do everything to make them last."

## Gems

THE God in whom we believe, to whom we pray, is but the faint image of the God that is. And when the soul is quickened into that fuller life, then shall it surely know God and see God as it is given to none of us to know and see him yet.

EXPERIENCE of life makes us sure of one thing, which we do not try and explain—that the sweetest happiness we ever know comes not from love, but from sacrifice, from the effort to make others happy.

## The Advantage of Politeness

It is a great mistake to imagine that in the hurry and bustle of business there is little time for politeness. We profess a great admiration for the courtesy and dignity of some still surviving "gentleman of the old school," and remark that it is a pity that such manners are not to be found in the men of to-day. But we attach no blame to anyone because he is occasionally not polite; rather we pity the present generation, who, in the struggle to advance their own interests, have to leave their manners behind them.

As a matter of fact, our pity is wasted. There is always time for politeness, and, instead of being a hindrance in professional or social life, it is of the greatest advantage. Inquire into the origin of some of these "gentlemen of the old school," and you will find that it formed a considerable part of the ladder by which they mounted to success. They very probably started in life as office boys, and, knowing the importance of good manners, took pains not only to be diligent and generally useful, but to model their behaviour after that of their employers. Without paying attention to the gentle art of politeness, and such little refinements as correct speech and enunciation, it was impossible for them to avoid jarring and irritating their chiefs, for at that time the road to success and fortune was controlled by men of breeding and courtly manners.

## Facetiæ.

TEACHER (to pupil): "How old are you?" Pupil: "Six." Teacher: "When were you six?" Pupil: "On my birthday."

SHE: "Did my voice fill the drawing-room?" He: "Yes, and it filled the conservatory and garden—everybody went out there."

A COMFORTING THOUGHT.—"A few million years hence the sun will give out no more heat." "Well, most of us won't be in need of heat."

A DECISIVE WAY.—Barber (who has been inflicting on his customer a ceaseless flow of anecdotes, stale jokes, &c.): "Is there any particular way in which you would prefer being shaved?" Colonel (exasperated): "Yes; in silence!"

BUSINESS.—Shopkeeper (to importunate commercial traveller): "Simkins, call the porter to kick this fellow out." Undaunted Commercial Traveller: "Now, while we're waiting for the porter I'll show you an entirely new line—best thing you ever laid eyes on."

PATIENT: "I've taken all the medicine you sent except this one bottle, and I don't seem to feel any better." Backwoods Doctor: "Yours must be an aggravated case. Farmer Acorn's cow was 'took down at the same time as you wuz, an' I giv' her just the same medicine exactly, and it cured her."

YOUNG LADY: "I suppose you have had some narrow escapes, Lieutenant Dashaway?" Lieut. Dashaway: "Ya-a-s. Awfully narrow escape once, bah Jove!" Young Lady (breathlessly): "In what way?" Lieut. Dashaway: "Vewy near ordbled on active service, don't-cher-know. The war came to an end before we embarked."

"My husband is so nice about explaining these war terms to me. I know I aggravate him awfully sometimes. Why, only think, I had to ask him this morning what the seat of war was-for. Yes? Wasn't it foolish? But he is so patient. The idea that I didn't have sense enough to see that it is for the standing army to use when it gets tired."

SHE HAD NOTICED.—Mr. Manhasset (in justification): "You will often hear it argued that the presence of a young lady typewriter in an office has a refining influence." Mrs. Manhasset (acidly): "Well, I have noticed that since you engaged one, instead of growling 'What's that?' or 'Umph' when I speak to you, you have acquired the habit of saying, 'What, dear?' and 'Eh, love?'"

NOT SO REMARKABLE.—"How did this happen?" asked the surgeon, as he dressed the wound in the cheek, and applied a soothing poultice to the damaged eye. "Got hit with a stone," replied the patient. "Who threw it?" "My—my wife," was the reluctant answer. "Hum—it's the first time I ever knew a woman to hit anything she aimed at," muttered the surgeon. "She was throwing at the neighbour's hens," explained the sufferer. "I was behind her."

THE LANGUAGE OF PRESENTS.—George: "What's wrong?" Jack: "I can't make out what Miss Pinkie's little present to me means." George: "If it's useful it means that she is interested in your comfort, and would probably say 'yes.' If it's only ornamental, it means that the present is sent merely as a little token to a friend." Jack: "The one she sent me is both useful and ornamental. It's a handsomely decorated 'individual saltcellar.'" George: "That means that she considers you both useful and ornamental, but a little too fresh."



## Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

**PAUL.**—By no means, unless his family and antecedents were well known to you. If this was the case, it would not be amiss to say at parting, "I should be glad to see you again."

**JESSIE.**—1. The engagement ring is not necessarily a diamond one; it may be of other stone. You should be governed in the purchase of such by the length of your purse. 2. The ring may be worn upon the third finger of the right hand. It is also worn by some on the third finger of the left hand, being replaced by the wedding-ring.

**MARTHA.**—Time is a great solver of difficulties. You are only eighteen, and you can well wait a year. You owe it to your parents to do so much. Meantime, try to convince them that they are wrong to oppose your choice. If they still do this, and for no other cause than for the young man's lack of money, then follow where your heart leads.

**EDIE.**—Your teeth can probably be straightened, but it is by a slow mechanical process known to dentistry. Go to a good dentist, or apply to one by letter. As to your other question, if hair can be made to grow upon places on the head that were scalded in infancy, we answer, no. The roots of the hair are killed. Your only remedy is to apply to a wig-maker, sending sample of your hair and size of place on scalp to be covered. He can then make you a false piece which will adhere to the scalp by applying the liquid glue used in mending wood and china—price, sixpence a bottle.

**FRED** is much piqued because he has heard that the young lady he has loved and visited for a long time ridicules him behind his back. He thinks it is because he is so thin; wishes to be told a way to get fat speedily; also how to get even with that fun-making girl? Don't you know, Fred, that girls usually talk against the very man they like best? It is queer, but true. The cause of it is they can't help speaking about the man who occupies their thoughts so constantly, and they are afraid others will find out the secret if they talk in his praise, so they say little detracting things about him often to those they know will defend him. Perhaps, too, your informant exaggerated the fun-making.

**A GENTLEMAN.**—Thackeray defined a gentleman somewhat in this wise: To be a gentleman is to be honest and brave, to be gentle, generous, and wise—to possess all these qualities, and to know, besides, how to exercise them in the most graceful manner. Ought a gentleman to be a loyal son, a true husband, an honest father? Ought his life to be decent, his bills paid, his tastes refined? Yes, a thousand times yes.

**PRUDENCE.**—It would be advisable, if you desire to live happily, to marry the man you love, and I can see no reason, provided he is a worthy object of that affection, for objection on the part of your parents. Perhaps, however, there is some objection to him which you have not mentioned. As you do not love the other party, it would be as well to let him know that such is the case, and relieve him of his suspense.

**JOE.**—Self-consciousness is the cause of your bashfulness. Try to cease thinking about how you look or act. Put yourself under the wing of some bright, kind-hearted matron or nice old maid, tell her your trouble, and get her to help you out. If you have any sisters or cousins, begin by attending them and meeting the other girls in their company. A young man who is attentive and courteous to his sisters and mother doesn't find it hard to be so to others.

**JOAN.**—It is said to be woman's fate to love men after they tire of them; but perhaps your friend left off visiting you through jealous pique. You say he never wanted you to receive other attentions than his own. Pride may keep him away from you. Relax a little in your cool treatment. Be friendly, but no more. Be as attractive as you can when in his presence, but don't let it be apparent that you are trying to please him. That spoils the effect.

**SCIENTIST.**—Arago, the celebrated French physicist, noted three kinds of lightning—forked, sheet and ball lightning. Lightning of the first class is known as forked lightning. That of the second class as sheet lightning, which has no definite form, but seems to be a great mass of light. It has not the intensity of lightning of the first class. When it occurs behind a cloud, it lights up its outline only. Occasionally it illumines the entire body of clouds, and seems to come from the very heart of it. Sheet lightning is very much more frequent than forked lightning. Lightning of the third kind is called ball lightning. Ball lightning lasts for several seconds, and, in this respect differs widely from lightning of the first and second classes, which are, in the strictest sense, momentary.

**JENNER.**—Give him time. A young fellow isn't always in the mood for asking, "Darling do you love me now as well as you did last night?" When the weather gets really warm perhaps his affections will bud forth more energetically. Tennyson tells us:

"In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love,"

so don't send for your ring yet awhile. Time will show whether he wishes to be recreant to his vows or is only taking a breathing spell. Meantime do nothing to your eyes to try to make them large and bright. It is belladonna that dilates the iris and makes the eye seem larger and also brighter, but belladonna is a poison and will ruin the sight and the health. Actresses, when they wish to make their eyes look larger, shut the lids and then draw a camel's hair brush with *pate brune* (brown paste) upon it along the eyelashes and just on the edge of the lids—a small, fine, dark line—must be delicately done.

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**ETTA.**—November 24, 1868, fell on Tuesday. Do not divide your attentions too liberally; but when you have a sincere admirer, and one likely to marry you, encourage him alone. There is an old motto: "Be off with the old love before you are on with the new."

**JOHN KENT.**—The famous marine underwriting company known as Lloyds derives its title from a popular inn in London, named Lloyd's Coffee House. Several merchants, interested in shipping, rented rooms in this hostelry, and for many years it was the headquarters of the most influential representatives of the mercantile community of the Metropolis. A subscription for indemnification of marine losses would be started, and wealthy business men would each subscribe such an amount as he chose to risk on the object. Anything done by these subscribers was "done at Lloyd's," and "insured at Lloyd's" signified that the property was insured by the subscribers who met there for business. The name at last became identified with the business, and the association of underwriters which now meets at the subscription rooms on the first floor of the Royal Exchange has given its name both to itself and its place of business. So we have Lloyd's Register and Lloyd's List, and in 1853 an Austrian Lloyd's was established at Trieste.

London  
Reader

SPOT COUPON.

July 13th, 1901.

THOMAS W.—Dancing is best learned from a master and by practice with others, but there are books that teach the steps and figures by illustration.

THUMB-NAIL.—Your hair is tawny in shade, and is very beautiful in quality. It is an old saying that a white mark on the thumb-nail is said to indicate a coming present; on the first finger, a letter; on the second, a friend; on the third, a foe; on the fourth, a journey to go. Your writing is that of a nervous, sensitive person, who must try to conquer her morbid fears that she is not lovable.

ANNA.—A clear complexion is easily attainable by any healthy woman. She must be temperate in her habits, take moderate exercise in the open air, and have plenty of sleep. Pimples and fleshworms are mainly caused by carelessness in toilet and diet; stimulants, greasy and rich food, should be avoided, and the face properly and frequently bathed. Before retiring, wash the face with a soft cloth, using rather warm water, to which has been added a pinch of borax, or two or three drops of the tincture of benzoin; use this amount to a quart of water, with pure castile soap, and dry the face gently but thoroughly, using a towel that is not too coarse. Never rub very hard, as a thorough and not a vigorous treatment improves the skin. In the morning wash the face with pure cold water, using very little or no soap, and dry gently, and your toilet is complete for the day.

PENELOPE.—There is greater need of education and broad scientific knowledge in farming than in almost any other business. It seems hard that an only son should not be able to comply with the wish of his father and stay on the old firm; but if your inclination points so strongly in another direction, your father is unwise not to let you follow where it leads. The course in a commercial college you so much desire would be a good thing for you. Study book-keeping particularly. As to the comparative remuneration from telegraphy and shorthand, it is hard to tell. First-rate ability in either is needed to success. If you learn shorthand, it would be better to combine it with type-writing. One is of little use without the other except to a newspaper reporter.

AGITATED.—"Pouring oil upon the troubled waters" is a familiar quotation, but the author of it is unknown to us. That oil has influence upon water has been frequently proved. Franklin once stilled the sea, to the astonishment of the uninitiated, by stretching his cane over the side of the ship, the cane having a small vial of oil in the end of it. Commander Wilkes, of the United States Navy, in confirmation of this statement, cited an instance where he saw the same effect, in a violent storm off the Cape of Good Hope, from the leakage of a sailing vessel, and stated that it was very curious to observe over what a great extent a small quantity of oil would produce the effect referred to.

RACHEL.—Martha means "bitterness," Deborah a "bee," Saul "desired," Paul "little," Rachel a "lamb."

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